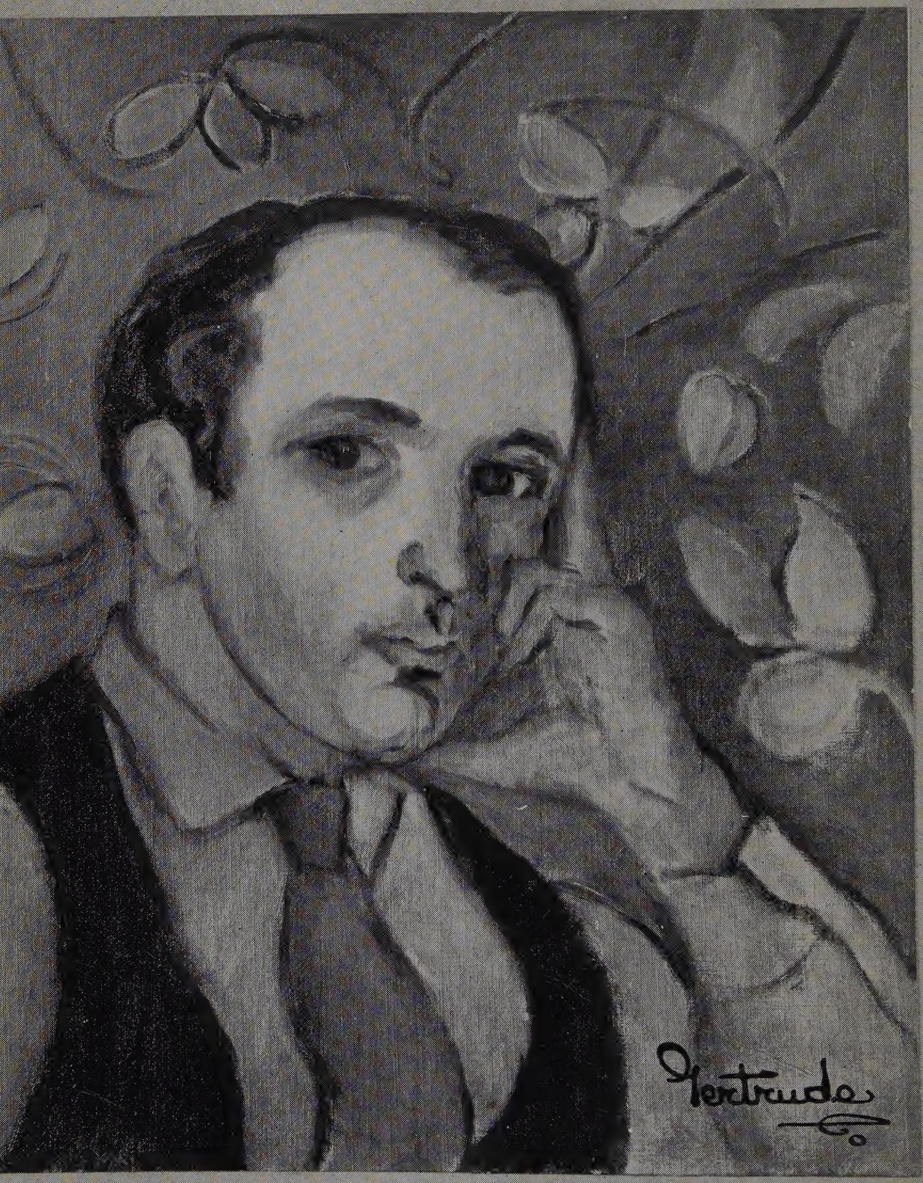
THE SEA

No. _____

THE TRVSTEES OF THE
PVBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE CITY OF
BOSTON
1852 1878
OMNIVM
LVX
CIVIVM

_____

THE SEA


Gertrudes

THE SEA

by JAMES OPPENHEIM

NEW YORK ALFRED · A · KNOPF MCMXXIV

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Published, March, 1924

Set up, electrotyped, and printed by the Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, N. Y.
Paper furnished by Kuenstner & Lucie Paper Company, Inc., New York
Bound by H. Wolff Estate, New York.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY"

It was the sea, ever the sea . . .
Whether along the mighty waves of the top
Or in the deep itself . . .
Still the sea, ever the sea . . .

But out of the sea into the skies of dawn
Flash of the wings and bird-notes falling.

TO

GERTRUDE

who came to me as

GOLDEN BIRD

from him she called most

fancifully

THE MUSIC

CONCERNING THE SEA

After many years of living and expressing a work which has acquired the magnitude, to me, of a world in itself, I find it difficult to put myself back at the beginning, to launch myself again with Songs for the New Age, to catch again the splendor and darkness of a moment which meant the opening of a life-work. I am not that young man. He pulled himself out of the mire in which the American was stuck, and in breaking many of his own chains, struck like a new Prometheus against the chains binding others. His zeal was the zeal of the Puritan—reversed. He plundered the Old Testament and Leaves of Grass and his own depths, and a book of a hundred songs came as an inundation, a confused glory, so that now it was the poet singing, and now the prophetical preacher denouncing. That something new came to be, he quite realized. That it was a first trumpet-tone, a herald of his own coming years, he did not know. The rebel is still what he rebels against. The revolt is a pulling of the new against the meshes of the old. But the old is still there, smiling and majestic and impregnable. Such, I now see, is Songs for the New Age.

It is different with *The Song of* The Sea (see section, The Solitary). Here the poet emerges. He creates on a scale that is new, in a symphonic manner which is his own. He has caught with his emotion the rhythm and stride of his age, of the Great War, of the future that must dawn, of the terrific forces, hidden and naked, which revolve and rock humanity, and intuitively he has laid out the epic of the individual, the star beyond democracy, the unheard song whose prelude is in Whitman and

Nietzsche. The revolutionist has then become a warrior of the new. And so he can come to the cool detachment of The Mystic Warrior.

He is really seeking something that transcends, for him as for every true modern, the greatness of the visionary on the one side, and the greatness of deeply rooted human life, caught in its set and deadening forms, on the other. One way he is called by the spirit; the other by the earth. But neither satisfies him. And out of this conflict is born that wonder-child which transcends the struggle, which brings into harmony the sensuous and the spiritual, which catches all life, not as matter of argument, or proof, or teaching, but as vision become flesh and flesh become vision. It is the Star that is born. It is supreme Beauty. It is Golden Bird. "The god struggling in my breast became a lark," and as the poem goes on:

" 'That is what the Earth means,' I cried,
'Why our planet goes with singing down the sky-road of the stars.' "

Such symbols are not slight things. They are the power moving toward the future, caught in a fecundating sign. They have power over life. So I see my whole work as moving to the birth of a symbol which has a significance beyond my own interpretation.

The beat and surge of the sea, first felt in The Mystic Warrior, and heard in Songs for the New Age, lifts to full sweep in *The Song of* The Sea in The Solitary: but it is Golden Bird, rising from the darkness of the depths and shining at last in the sky, which sings the final meaning of the book. For the whole work is our crude modern life, torn in two by that divided desire which now seeks to attain heaven and shun earth and now seeks to win earth and shut out heaven. The war rages on. And out of that strength which refuses to choose one side or the other but demands both, which is determined

that all of life shall be lived, comes the divine sign, the illuminating and living symbol, the transcending Beauty which binds all together, which makes inward and outward gazing the same glory, which is a star toward the future drawing every effort and all diversities to a new aim—namely, Golden Bird.

As a whole the book shows the struggle out of which the symbol was born, and gives an allegorical account (Stanner) of how the symbol was finally won as a living part of life itself.

JAMES OPPENHEIM

New York,
January, 1924.

NOTE

In consolidating this book out of its previously published parts, I have somewhat cut down Songs for the New Age, omitted the uninspired War and Laughter volume altogether, taken from The Book of Self only The Song of Life, made various changes in the remainder of the material, and added Stanner and the Interludes which continue the Mystic Warrior as little inner connecting hallways between the different sections.

Songs for the New Age was written in 1914 and is the earliest work of mine included in the book. The Mystic Warrior was not written until 1920 when the whole plan of the book had come clear, and the need arose of an introductory section of autobiography. Hence, The Mystic Warrior, a later work, precedes Songs for the New Age, the earliest. Otherwise the book proceeds chronologically, as written.

I might add that in 1909 I published a volume of songs called Monday Morning and Other Poems. The book is mainly in meter and rhyme, some of it in the strictest forms, as for instance Mountaintop, written when I was 20, but much of it was an attempt to adapt the English tradition to a newer music, which demanded more subtlety and symphonic effect. However, the book also contains excerpts from Adam and Eve, an early work of mine in free verse, my first excursion, when I was 23. I put aside this form, however, to finish up, as it were, the English tradition, as later I had to go through and free myself from our new tradition of Whitman.

Of free verse I wrote in 1923: "I have always contended

that free verse must have the dominant beat or pulse which song has always had, but also that it becomes a greater and lovelier music because the monotony of meter is replaced by the blending of varied rhythms. In this way it quite departs from both poetic prose and metrical verse."

I wish to acknowledge my thanks to B. W. Huebsch, Inc. for permission to republish The Solitary in this volume.

J. O.

CONTENTS

Frontispiece: PORTRAIT *by* GERTRUDE S. GERTRUDE.

CONCERNING THE SEA ix

NOTE xiii

I. THE MYSTIC WARRIOR 1

II. SONGS FOR THE NEW AGE 141

WE DEAD

BEFORE STARTING 145
LET NOTHING BIND YOU 146
SELF 147
WHEN IN THE DEATH OF LOVE 148
WHERE LOVE ONCE WAS 149
LOVE AND MARRIAGE 150
THE HAUNTED HEART 151
THE CLINGING ARMS 152
PROPERTY 153
THE MORNING STARS 154
THE SLAVE 155
THE LAUGHER 156
PATTERNS 157
THE PARADOX 158
WAITING 159
THE DESCENDING HOUR 160

Sickliness 161
Abide the Adventure 162
Take Physic, Pomp! 163
A Winter Night 164
The Italian Mother 165
The Hag 166
Priests 167
The Rock 168
Action 169
Transfigurations 170
The Millennium 172
Funerals 173
Crime 174
Too Human 175
Jottings: 176
New Born 176
Listen 176
The Sea is Itself 176
The Flame 176
The Sea Whispers 177
Breast of Earth 177
Shh! 177
Two Faces 177
Masters 178
To the Perilous Open 179
Bereft 180
Tasting the Earth 182
Renunciation 184
WE DEAD 185

We Living

The Man Speaks 193
The Woman Speaks 195

Beloved 196
Annie 197
The Love-Hour 199
A Woman for the Adventure 200
When a Woman is Wanted 202
Folk-Hunger 204
On the Way to Hell 205
The Bakery Waitress 206
In Talk with a Prostitute 207
The Cup of Dew 208
The Lonely Child 209
Not Overlooked 210
The New Babe 211
Had I the Wings 212
The Body 213
The Sun-Children 214
Sun, with a Million Eyes 215
One Flesh 216
At Home 217
I Could Write the Psalms Again 218
Praise 219
Dancers 220
Washington Square 221
Sky-Lover 223
The Flocks 224
The Tree 225
Jottings: 226
Books 226
Arrival and Departure 226
Exile 226
The Edge of the Possible 227
The Baffled One 227
Friends 228
As to Being Made a Fool Of 229

The Writer of Many Books 230
The Mighty Hour 231

We Unborn

The Mother 235
Death 236
Looking Down on Earth 237
The Runner in the Skies 238
In the Theatre 239
The Surveyor 240
A Handful of Dust 241
Assurance 243
The Risen Ones 244
The Dreamer in Me 245
We Unborn 246

III. INTERLUDE: THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (continued) 255

IV. THE SONG OF LIFE 261

V. INTERLUDE: THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (continued) 317

VI. THE SOLITARY 327

For Randolph Bourne 329
The Song of The Sea 335
Songs Out of Solitude 369
The Ship of Skies 371
Mist 372
Silence 375
Rain-Song 376
Summer Night 377
Nocturne 382

Gray Evening 387
Morning Song 389
The Rainbow 391
Shadow 395
Hymn to Death 399
Sunset 402
Songs Out of Multitude 407
Europa 409
Folk-Soul 416
The Fires of Pittsburg 418
The Song of the Uprising 425
The Ironic Spirit 435
Debs 437
Memories of Whitman and Lincoln 438
My Land 443
Night 445
Night 447

VII. INTERLUDE: THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (continued) 469

VIII. GOLDEN BIRD 473

I. Golden Bird 475
Nausicaa 477
Comet 479
Wild-rose 481
Golden Bird 483
Lily-of-the-Valley 486
Beautiful 488
Music 489
Miracle 490
Wonder 491
Wingèd Heart 493
Slumber-Song for My Love 494

Second Slumber-Song 496
Love's Proof 497
Madness 498
Daybreak 499
Sunward 500
The Golden Love-Song 501
Star of Maidens 503
Divine Child 504
Resurrection 505
Breath of the Deep 507
Star-Dance 508
Indian Summer 509
In an Old Square 510
The Dance-Song 512
The Enemy 514
Death-Song 515
The Attempted Portrait 516
Birds of Our Joy 519
The Singer 521
The Man 522
II. Hebrews 523
Hebrews 525
III. The Great Mother 527
War 529
Devil-Song 532
Abyss 535
The Great Mother 538
IX. STANNER: THE MUFFLED CITY 543
X. EPILOGUE 551
I. The Binding of the Years 553
II. Dead Gods 556
INDEX OF FIRST LINES 559

I

THE MYSTIC WARRIOR

PART ONE
UNDERCURRENT

THE world was a dream of beauty, an ache of loveliness,
An ache that I felt in my body,
A phallic pain,
As though I must unite myself like the sky with the earth . . .
It was unbearable . . .
For everything spoke of death, everything whispered in my ears,
"James you will die . . .

Hence, the transciency, the will-o'-the-wisp evanescence of beauty,
The too brief morning, the shadow that grew with afternoon,
The coming of the fear of darkness, the menace of the night . . .

I lived with death and life . . .
I lay sweating and trembling in bed in blackness . . .
I moaned to myself and prayed . . .
What was that in the corner glimmering bulky and pale?
Did it move? Was it crouching? Would it come to the bedside and clutch me?
And the window . . . who was rattling the window and beginning to push it up?
Were those eyes in the blackness at the foot of the bed?
How should I live all night? how should I survive the ordeal?

Mother was in the next room: I might have called her . . .
I could not: I should rather die than have her know I was a coward . . .

Then, suddenly, I opened my eyes . . .
It was bright morning . . . sunlight flooded in . . .
The room was simple and sweet . . . shadows were gone . . .
The curtain was blowing in the breeze . . . was it Spring?
Summer?

I smelt faint honeysuckle, I heard the gay sounds of carts . . .
My heart leaped with abandonment of joy . . .
So deep the terror, the very taking away of it filled me with
laughter and rhapsody . . .
I went in bare feet on the cool floor and flung up the
window . . .
I saw the glow and colour of earth, trees, countryside, roads
and the sky;
I praised God without thinking of him;
I was mad with love; I wanted only to shout and dance;
I wanted only to kiss and clasp, and run down the road through
the sunlight . . .

Then, after breakfast, grammar . . .
I sat under the maple tree and tried to look at my book . . .
It was meaningless . . .
My glance wandered over the glazed air of the tremulous fields,
Over the waving corn, over the green orchard, over the hills,
I saw the happy children playing down at the brook-side,
I saw a butterfly in sunlight fluttering about the porch-pillars
of the farm-house,
I saw a chipmunk flitting along the grey stone-wall . . .
Phantasy possessed me . . . I lounged and dreamed . . .
I saw that beautiful white and gold lady and her soft rose
cheeks and her smiling eyes . . .
And everything was too beautiful . . .
Too beautiful the blue of the sky, green of the earth,
Too poignant the gleam of wonder in butterfly wings,
Too aching lovely the summer fields, the glaze of the
morning . . .

My throat was clutched with tears . . .
I wanted to weep my life out on that gentle bosom of my dreams . . .
The pain of sex was mine . . . the mystic something that pulsed between earth and sky,
Danced in a rhythm down the wayward quick-step of the brook,
Throbbed in the glaze, waved through the leaves of the maple at the caress of the winds,
Flowed sinuous through the moving body of a young girl in shadow and shine down the road,
The beating of my heart, the quickening phallic pulsation,
The dream of nakedness in nature, of a covert in the woods, and moss, and silence,
And the white and gold body that melted coolly with mine . . .
Till the Magic Carpet of dream bore me half-delirious, half-maddened, in a strange stupor,
Into the mystic love-gardens of the Thousand Nights and One,
Whence I returned, exhausted, dull . . .

And now my great friend the sun was starting down the ominous, portentous slope . . .
He would leave me . . . he would leave me to death and darkness . . .
He would abandon me with a last backward glory of shouting colors;
Earth would grow cold, the damp edge in, the blackness take all . . .

I was an outcast, an exile, abandoned . . . there was no help for me . . .
I must go again to the Terror, I must go again to the ever-present monster of darkness . . .
I must go to the cold sweat and the incessant shivering,
I must lie and think: "I am alive now and I am I:

Suppose something kills me? Will I see it killing me? Will I know I am dead?
Or will I stop being at all?"

And at that last thought my body would become a stone of revolt . . .
I would freeze with protest . . .
What! This "I," this intensely vivid, defiant, aching, ecstatic self
To be cheaply trampled under heel, stamped out in the mud like a beetle?
Was I to be scattered, and cease?

O, only one who has felt this terror knows what it is to live!
It is when you look death in the face and recoil
That you live with sting and passion in every atom of your being . . .
I no longer know that terrible ecstasy of mere existence
When to draw a breath is a voluptuous miracle,
And such a swim of beauty pours over the brain
That only song is vent and release . . .

But I knew it then . . .
Did I say the days were happy?
They, too, held their anguish . . . anguish of desire and fear . . .
Though I loved the woods, could I venture into them alone?
Were there not chimerical beasts? Were there not snakes?
I think I was afraid of my shadow in those days . . .
I think the Dark Presence was always near me, whispering, "James, James, James, you are going to die" . . .

Always, I could love life so, because I hated death so . . .
I hated the abyss on which I walked . . .
I accused creation of treachery and malicious trickery

So to bring me to life, to offer me such a feast of beauty and joy,
To fill me with immortal delights, with loves and powers,
And then to stand back of me like a shadow tarnishing all,
Poisoning the sun and earth and the air,
Sickening my body,
Threatening to snatch me into nothingness without preparation or warning . . .
Every mouthful might be my last, every joy might be cut in career;
I was defenceless, hopeless, lost and alone . . .

And nobody bothered his head about it!
Every one else went gaily along as if he were an immortal!
My neighbours were godlike in their unconscious sufficiency!
Some of them even loved to go to bed and to go to sleep . . .
What was I, so unlike them, a stranger, a coward, a despicable baby?
Or did *I* know, and *they* didn't? Was it mine alone, this ghastly secret of death?

Did I say I loved life and hated death?
Ah, not so, not so . . .
Really, I didn't know it, but I was a lover of death . . .
It is the Walts who love life; who plunge like swimmers into the sea of the roaring streets,
Who transform with immediate love the shattered and squalid slums,
Who take in their arms the roughs and cripples and monsters of the world,
Who hear in noise the music of the marching race,
And in confusion see the God at work . . .

Not I! not I!
Somewhere midway between life and death was the garden I was seeking . . .
A garden wrought all of the wonder and beauty of the earth,
Wrought of the images of mountains, meadows and cities,
And images of people,
And in the heart of it the Belovèd . .
And there I should wander and with a magic wand raise new civilizations,
Build and break empires, set armies a-clash in smoky battles,
Anoint the gods and set the dusk upon them . . .
Sit at my ease and watch the light-draped maidens dance . . .
I would be Aladdin . . .
I would be the God of the Looking-Glass World . . .
It was the "mirror held up to nature" . . . it was the world of art . . .
I was always the artist to my finger-tips . . .

Yes, I was one who hated both life and death . . .
I wanted to live in the safety within the mirror
Where the images of life and death blended in timeless beauty,
And there was neither the hard task, the heavy responsibility,
The sweat, the noise, the nervous tension of earth,
Nor yet the ghastly oblivion, the "nothing, nothing" of death . . .

What should such creatures as I do "crawling between heaven and earth"?

A widow with six children: a delicate, sensitive woman:
Americans of the middle class:
A dark and handsome family, gentle and home-loving . . .

Mother-hen with her chicks wandering from place to place,
country and city . . .
But the faint stigmata of being Jews like a shadow upon
them . . .

The Mother was the air they breathed, the doctrine they
imbibed . . .
The quivering tentacles of her nerves were rooted in the
children's hearts . . .
Her dark in-dwellings, her great fears, her loves and hopes,
Her passions, poignancies of experience,
Her mean health, headaches, colds, sore throats,
Those, and much else, entered the souls of her children . . .

Mother and I were much alike:
And yet I must be much different:
I was the eldest son, and an immense burden was laid on my
shoulders . . .

What can I say of my father? He died when I was six . . .
I think of him mainly as dark and tall, with warm magnetic
love,
With ringing laughter and deep-bassed singing, a vivid and
brilliant person,
Passionate over his large family, a democrat and a doer;
He charms me through and through, he is strangely, lovably
human,
His rough cheek rubs against mine, he smells rich of
tobacco . . .

I am in disgrace: I am sent supperless to bed, and lie in
blackness:
I am sobbing loud sobs of desolate exile, despairing guilt:
I may expect no mercy, no help, no assuagement nor
healing . . .

My father enters softly; he lies down on the bed beside me;
He takes me in his arms . . .

I am soothed, quiet . . . I have never been so happy in all
my days . . .
O, I love him . . . I have found the beloved . . .
Found the haven, the heaven of arms I long for . . .
I fall asleep on his shoulder . . .

Quiet and hush . . . it is a sunny autumn afternoon . . .
The four-story brown-stone house is uncannily silent . . .
I am a tailor: I am cutting and sewing a pair of pants for my
little brother:
My aunt is there, taking my mother's place . . . both mother
and father are sick . . .
My little grandmother comes in, walks softly, inaudibly by
me . . .
She carefully pulls down the shades, making the room
yellow . . .

I confront her: "Why do you pull down the shades,
grandma?"
It is hard for her to speak: I see red around her eyes: she is
crying . . .
She says there is too much sunlight . . .

Then she looks at me, hesitates, takes me by the arm,
Whispers in my ears, "James, your father is dead" . . .

I am proud she has told me the secret . . .
I go on fitting the pants on my brother: they are rather tight
for him . . .

Two days have passed . . . it is morning . . . the house is
full of miracles . . .

I am led down to my mother's room: she lies in bed, so pale, so thin, so poor . . .
Her tears flow as she kisses me . . .

I smell flowers—lilies, roses, violets—I shall never forget that smell . . .
I am taken down in the long parlour where my father always sang so darkly
"Old Black Joe," and "Suwanee River," and "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground" . . .
There are people there: uncles and aunts: grandpa and grandma . . .
There are camp-stools, and a black-cloth coffin smothered in flowers . . .

I am full of wonder: my aunt raises me in her arms to say good-bye to my father . . .
I say, "Good-bye, father" . . .
She says: "Promise your father you will take his place" . . .
I begin, "I promise,"—then I see my father . . .
See his dark quiet face, the eyes in sleep, the hands laid on the breast,
The black dress-suit, the stiff collar and shirt . . .

And now my infancy is ended . . .
For this is death; I have come face to face with my enemy, death . . .
A lightning-bolt of the inexorable truth goes slaying the babe through me and through me . . .
My beloved lies dead . . . I shall never see my father again . . .
Death has taken him from me . . .

O broken heart of a child . . . even now, saying this, I go blind with hot tears . . .

The child, held there, promising, broke in wild sobs of anguish,
And was mercifully taken away . . .

Servant-girls soothed me, saying, "He is an angel now,"
And religion began for me . . .
Like a primitive I accepted the immortality of the soul . . .

Thereafter, in dark hours, I shut myself in the little top-floor room,
And knelt and beseeched my father to come to me,
Poured my young love out of my heart's cup before him,
And a little found my God . . .

But now I must take his place: I must hurry and be a man . . .
Strange task for the dreamy little singer and artist!
I became immensely responsible toward my brothers and sisters,
Tried to companion my mother and share in her problems,
Grew sober, alert and grave . . .
And then through all the years ran this double strain:
"I must be my father," "I must be a singer" . . .
The artist and man contended in me, hating each other . . .

Out of the conflict grew the abrupt ambition,
The dream of empire and of conquest,
Of wealth, world-power, prestige,
To be all things that my little world expected of a man . . .

And against it all, I wanted, not to be my father,
But to be the child encircled by my father's love . . .
I wanted to go from the hard weary world, the torture of existence,
The clash and dust of my brain,
Into that cell of abnegation and quiet
Where the invisible Beloved hovers,

And I should give birth to the divine child,
My inspired song, my poem, born in love . . .

So I wished often I could remain a child . . .
So I wished only to be an artist . . .
And so, torn as in two, at last I merged man and artist,
And out of my art made my ambitious conquering career,
Sold my love for power, converted religion into livelihood,
And gave the artist in me to be a semi-harlot of the press . . .

It was then I had an ancient complaint called "the dead soul,"
And knew a few brittle years of hard, bright winnings . . .
Had my own family, my place in the world, my appetites,
And came to the pit of cold despair . . .

Those were my most American days:
In those days I could celebrate America with Walt's own gusto . . .
But the Walts find their souls in the huge love they pour over terrible facts,
The James's only lose their souls, being more lovers of Gods, than men . . .

I must smile now:
I suddenly see a picture of that sober little fellow
Gravely conferring with his mother . . .
He is always ready to discuss things with her:
She interests him in books and pictures:
They talk practical problems together . . .

He is, indeed, the little father . . .
He compels his brothers and sisters to join his great imaginings,

His games, inventions, plays:
He bosses them around . . .

He begins to dream of being the father of the world . . .
From the very depths of his fear of the world
Springs an ardour to conquer it . . .
He learns about Napoleon and Lincoln and Jesus Christ . . .
Shall he be a soldier, a statesman, a millionaire or a saviour?
Which father shall he be?

Demosthenes the stammerer became a great orator,
Pale sickly Bonaparte held Europe in his eagle-talons,
The crude youth of Avon wrote Hamlet and King Lear,
The railsplitter sat in the White House,
The child in the manger became the redeemer of mankind . . .
Fearful, timorous, bossy, over-masculine, shy girlish James,
Under his weight of fears, the slave of Demon Death,
By what path should he climb to the throne of God and hurl
the bearded governor from his seat?

I do not expand here:
I would sometimes stand in a dizziness and crass excitement
of ambition
So great, I had rapidly to walk it off;
I could hardly at such moments live with myself . . .
I was already throned and crowned, high over the heads of the
awe-struck multitudes,
The Earth a marble in my pocket . . .

And one day I was in Central Park with my mother . . .
(Do I dream this or is it so?)
Over the walk came swinging an old giant of pink and white,
His collar open, his flowing luminous beard blowing in the
wind, his head bare,
Hat in his pendulous hand . . .

And she told me he had to do this because of pains in his head . . .
Every day he walked from one end of Central Park to the other . . .
He was a poet:
His name was Walt Whitman . . .

I see him still rounding the hill poised like a sun-god against the blue sky . . .
My father had an early edition of Leaves of Grass . . .
I looked in, shocked, repelled, attracted: a burst of health seemed to envelope me:
A sea-breeze blew from that book scattering vapours of death:
I had found my opposite—it would be years before I loved him . . .

For I was lulled in old sweet songs: rhymes were like lullabies in my brain . . .
And I remembered in adolescence away with my sister by a little wild lake
My one-volume Shakespeare, and the dream of magic that swept me away . . .
I could not have told what I was reading . . .
I could not grasp the plot, the thought, the people . . .
I was riding the cataracts of sheer sound, of the spheral music . . .
I wept, exulted, despaired over the drip of tones . . .

It was the same with Wagner:
My brother and I accidentally hearing Tristan and Isolde from a high gallery,
And suddenly the scarf waved and the opera house burst wide open and became the sky dense with suns,
And I rose a comet of exultant song among the audient planets . . .

Walt has said of himself: "Whatever that boy saw, that he became" . . .
It was not exactly so with me . . .
Whatever I saw that was great, that I seemed to become . . .

I had various teachers . . .
There was one when I was fourteen:
He taught chastity, brotherhood, social work, unselfishness . . .
He lived among the poor . . .
And he was under a relentless good man of powerful brain
Who was thinking out new religions and teaching ethics . . .
A Jew, this last . . . an intellectual Messiah . . .

The Messiah-dream is deep in the Jew
For he needs a Messiah . . .
Jesus, the Jew, out of this need was born out of Jewry:
He fulfilled the Jew in himself by overcoming the Jew . . .

So, through these teachers I became puritan and good,
A saint by day, a voluptuary in secret in the fearful night,
And gradually the image of Jesus came to dominate me . . .

Gradually I blended my Napoleon, my Lincoln, my Shakespeare, my Wagner and Jesus
Into a Messiah who should conquer and save the world through song . . .
Nay, more: a Messiah who should be a song . . .

And I? I was Mary . . .
No more the father of the world, but its holy mother . . .
The sorrowing world needing to be reborn . . .

It was so I became an inspired artist . . .
Only years later could I understand what I had been doing . . .

For always in the midst of failure and fear, and when I felt
trampled and despairing,
I withdrew from others in violent black mood,
I withdrew into storm-cloud,
I withdrew actually from the love of mother or wife or child
Back to the love of the shadow-parent, my God,
I entered the mirror of images,
I was enclosed in the black womb of the greater self,
I lay as one dead . . .
And then I arose and found my courage and began to struggle,
Set up in my spirit the rhythm of love with this God,
And in a spasm of the love-act and the need of birth,
This rhythm ran with words, became the rhythm of song . . .

For I had made the mystic discovery:
At thirteen years, in the wood, beside a brook,
At fifteen, in longshore streets at sunset,
At nineteen, on Morningside Heights coming from college,
The mystic vision flashed open the world . . . I saw the God
in things . . .

I had come over the headlands to the shore of that silver sea
Which lies in the spirit of man,
That sea which has washed the brains of all our immortals,
Whose waves, running whitely in, break songs of the ages on
our human coasts,
Bring timeless wisdom and revelation. . . .

And I, reaching into myself in darkness of storm,
Pitiably little, a waif blown out of the world,
Became one with the Dæmon,
Became the supernatural mother,
And the terrific tide of song poured through me,
And I knew myself no mere mortal but a God,
And that my song was verily Christ . . .

So the defeated boy, terrified of life and of death,
The least of these, could be first;
He could in the ecstasy and agony of creation transcend mortality:
He could reach by magic the goals of ambition,
He could bring to the Earth a revelation, a religion . . .

How well this should have been
Had the fruit been equal to the vision and passion . . .
But look, here it was, the poor crude little song . . .
And the great world roared on unaware of the new-born Christ . . .

Was it then the Christ? O harrowing doubt!
Down I plunged again into the abyss of self-contempt . . .
I would turn from song, I would conquer the world direct,
I would be a man . . .

I essayed, and failed . . . song lured me again . . .
Again the storm-cloud, again the agony,
Again the triumph of music and vision . . .

And so I turned to song as the drunkard to whiskey . . .
I debauched myself with music . . .
I lived only for the terrible divine hours of Dionysiac madness . . .
Song was my comfort, my stay . . .

Not that there was no counter-current . . .
Like a drunkard, I tried to cure myself:
I was cruel in self-dicipline . . .
I tried ever to live the religion of my songs . . .
To be interested in others, to join good causes, to work among the poor,

And last, and greatest, to learn how to love . . .

Love? What did I love but the God with whom I became one,
The God I almost ousted like a triumphant Satan? . . .
I sang love, but did not love . . .

And yet in a way I was all love . . .
I was all a dream of women . . .
And it was because women were so beautiful, and I beauty's slave,
That I downed them, cheapened them in my heart;
I had been lost else in the whirlpool of white bodies
Where youth goes down in desire . . .
I saved myself, turning from love of women to love of the great God . . .
To the love that knows no sweat and pain of the dust in it,
No nesting, mating, breeding, drudging . . .

But I *must* love: I turned, and married . . .
A little boy was born. . . . I must play the father . . .
We were poor and penniless . . . I must play the man . . .
I warped the divine song into stories of the poor which I sold to the press . . .
Harsher grew the discipline, greater the need of money . . .
We lived, not like the poor, but comfortably and middle-class . . .
I must make great swollen sums from my art . . .
More and more I must change my writing to something bright and casual . . .
I must grow more popular . . .

And as this came about, I felt for the first time death in me . . .

Something was gone . . . some precious flame was extinguished . . .
I was like a hollow shell adumbrating old echoes out of a dead past . . .
I grew listless, sick, and turned to the comforts and sleeknesses of life . . .
Now I was seeking a Saviour for myself . . .
I that had been a Saviour, now needed one . . .
In death I sought for life . . .

New knowledge came . . .
My marriage broke open and showed itself for what it was,
No marriage, on either side . . .
I had been no husband, I had no wife . . .
The marriage ended . . . I went off to a life of lonely poverty . . .
And in that life, in anguish, listening, brooding,
I heard from far-off the murmur of the divine music coming like a turning tide back to me,
I heard in my depths the pure song,
The soul returned with music . . .

I could not question: I could only give glad tears of rejoicing and joy . . .
I shaped that glory as it came: I wrought my book . . .
You may understand it now: that book of birth . . .

Is this all there is to report?
Was it all abysmal weakness and monstrous egotism?
Or is there not something in the very nature of such as I that delights in exposing frailty
Where a Walt exults in himself?

Partly that:
And partly that the world wasn't made for the Hamlets, the Dantes, the Raskolnikoffs and the Poes . . .
Through the eyes of the world they see themselves black and base . . .
They must be Gods and Demons, lest they be scum among men . . .

But these men have also the Prince in them . . .
This poor James was also charming and magnetic . . .
A handsome lad, with face like a cherub, open and generous . . .
Many women and girls could yearn over him, though they felt him too much of the spirit for passionate love . . .
He was too modest if anything, put no one beneath him, treated all alike,
Served, waited and fetched, loved to be a teacher, romped with the children,
Read poetry aloud with a sensuous voice, very musical and rich,
Had in him some gift of soothing and cooling the fever of others . . .

He would lie for hours with his boys and pat them to sleep . . .
And he had almost a genius for friendship . . .
With the true friend, he was sensitive, subtle, moving on waves of understanding,
Weaving deep talk and vistas of vision . . .
In truth, with whomever he was at the time, he identified himself
And warmly lived inside the life of the other . . .
Simple people often loved him, children came running to him . . .

He could do excellent work also in his jobs . . .
Was inventive, rapid, energetic,

Was swift to success, though in the end he turned away to his singing . . .
He could advise much with his elders,
An excellent head for the problems of others,
Much sweetness and light in him, a certain harsh vigour at times, an Olympian detachment . . .

Is that enough to fill out the other side,
To see him in his varied humanity,
His good badness, his bad goodness,
Strength and weakness—
A spirit as protean as the weather, the sea,
A child of nature, born more for the moon than the sun,
One incapable of fixed conditions, of long endurances,
Charming, unstable, churned with too great emotions, intellectual, self-conscious—
The artist, finally, the artist?

Yet what is the artist?
Is he not also the strange hero of the people,
Something more than natural, a half-god creating half-worlds whose glory leads us to new worlds?
Is he not a whimsical mystery among us,
A zigzag skating fire that disturbs our comfort,
A sacrifice for the race, whereby vision dies for no people?

He is the mystic warrior in that dark abyss where the cosmic monsters play:
Baffled and beaten and overthrown he lies down in the belly of God,
Then rises, and strikes till the blood gushes and the music runs,
And like old Prometheus he brings the fire of the heavens as a torch to the race:

Prophecy he brings from the very matrix of the dark buried
Wisdom,
Revelations out of life deeper than the eyes have ever seen,
And loves unimagined before . . .

America shuns him, cutting herself off from her own greatness:
But he comes nevertheless . . . he is Walt riding on top a bus,
and Poe dreaming of stars in a cottage with his wife dying,
And Emerson, absent-minded, minded of the Oversoul, in Concord woods,
And Hawthorne moody in sad Puritanism,
And Mark Twain smoking his cigars in bed, sweating and
groaning over Huckleberry Finn,
And giant-like tearful Dreiser, and Sandburg sitting in a newspaper office,
And Vachel Lindsay jazzing in Paradise (or is it Springfield,
Illinois?),
And Masters among all souls in strange Spoon River,
And yes, even this struggling James with his great ambitions . . .

So I speak for the artist . . .
But also I speak for the multitude like myself, with equal
struggles and the same yearnings,
The same sorrows, joys and lamentings,
But no gift: inarticulate, frustrated, America's victims.

Where was I in America?
Walt went through with eyes, hands, ears all leaping from him,
Grasping the bright facets of the crowds and the shows and
sights,
Intensely, concretely aware of pilots and bus-men, lilacs and
thrushes,

Bathing forever in the tumults and tastes of reality . . .

But I had to stop and look if I wanted to see anything,
Stop, and pinch myself, and strain to stare at the world about me . . .
I could see it well enough, if I tried to,
I could get drunk on it all, too . . .
I could be half-crazed with the teasing of a line, a colour, the glance of a face,
Trying to set it down in words . . .
I could exult in crowds, in the sunrise, and moon on waters . . .
But this came through discipline . . .
My natural way was to go through crowded streets blind to everything,
Lost in my worrying dream . . .

I remember in early manhood how I hated America with a great hate. . .
Hated the sordid noon-streets, ugly with brick and dirt,
Filthy with people . . .
How I lived in a Settlement House among the poor, and never saw the poor except by holding my nose . . .
Was as naturally an aristocrat as Walt was a democrat,
And only came to a passion for human causes
Through a great drenching in Lincoln, John Brown and Whitman . . .

Why record oneself like this?
Because the Great Society will have to come down from all to each:

Each, to be more than himself, must first be himself.
Out of what we are, and not out of slogans and manifestoes
and creeds, may we truly live together . . .
Walt has recorded the children of the sun: they are many . . .
I would record the children of the moon: they are very
many . . .
We may only reveal our kind through revealing ourselves . . .

America is not alone a Walt, and a Franklin, and a Lincoln,
It is also a Poe, a Hawthorne: it is also I.

Art has always revealed man to man,
But we are done with the standard man, the abstract hero . . .
Today the individual must reveal his own self
If he would hold the mirror up to nature . . .

I say to my kind: Let us dare to be what we are,
Let us cease to play we are opposites of our natures,
Let us not dream we can follow a Walt down the dust of the
open road,
Let us not try to be Abraham Lincolns,
Let us not mask ourselves with the masks of the great lovers:
But let us seek height inwardly, through our natural love,
Love libraries and laboratories,
Find our true friends and true gods,
Follow the devil of our dreams,
Seek freedom in our own way,
Make our lives unique gifts of power, character, works,
Give to America, which has had the sun,
Also the moon and the cloud-daubed stars . . .

We must strike free of tradition'd America, however our blood
sings with it,
Strike free even of our sun-gods, Walt and Abraham,
Strike free to be ourselves, lest we lose ourselves and be noth-
ing . . .

PART TWO
OUTER LIFE

AT 2

A black dog and a red dress,
A big black dog and a beautiful red dress,
I am afraid of the dog,
I love the dress . . .

I scream if the dog is with me, and I scream if the dress is taken away from me . . .
I am parted from the dog: I am carried a thousand miles away from the dog:
But neither nurse, mother nor father dare to part me from the dress . . .

You see I might scream all the way from St. Paul to New York . . .
So I win my first victory, and wear the dress by day, and have it in my arms at night . . .
I wear it to shreds and patches . . .

In New York a picture is taken of me . . .
I am in a big chair and look outrageously angry, with dark large flashing eyes;
My hair is all curls about my shoulders:
I am a little beauty and somewhat of a demon . . .
But I am not in my red dress . . .

AT 3-4

Fire-engines are on Seventieth Street . . .
Elsa and I are out, in great excitement . . .
There are crowds of people, and pumps working, and the smell of smoke . . .

We go into the house again . . .
Nurse stops me and says: "How would you like to have a new sister?"
Out of the masculine pride of four years I answer:
"I'd rather have a new brother."
"Well," she laughs, "you have a new brother" . . .
"Where is he?" I ask . . .
"Doctor brought him; he's up with your mother, and your mother is sick."
I am much pleased: then nurse laughs and says:
"But you have a new sister, too:
Doctor brought two babies this time: they are twins" . . .

I am shocked at this overturn of the laws of nature,
And refuse to believe it, till, later, sure enough,
There goes nurse with a curious infant in each arm,
And when one begins to cry the other cries also as if they both were one . . .

AT 4–5

We seem nothing but babies . . .
Ramsey at four is so weak he is in a baby-carriage,
And the twins have a double carriage between them,
And baby Doretta has a carriage, too . . .
Proudly Elsa and I walk beside this cavalcade . . .

We debouch on Central Park among a flotilla of babies,
One would think the world were very young . . .
And coming home, careless nurse spills Ramsey, and he strikes
his head on the stones,
And a sweet woman takes the whole family into her house
And feeds us cookies and milk . . .

AT 4–5

Father comes home, smelling all of tobacco . . .
He whistles in the lower hall, and pell mell we rush shouting
down the stairs . . .
He lifts us one after another for a kiss . . .
Then he pulls out six toys: one for each of us:
And I am his eldest son, so I shall choose first . . .
My choice lies between a harmonica and a toy watch . . .

I am proud to have first choice: I choose the toy watch:
And then for several days I wonder why I didn't choose the
harmonica . . .
Ramsey got the harmonica and can squeak with it . . .
What good is a toy watch, anyway?
Ramsey is always lucky . . .

AT 5

Father says if I go to kindergarten all alone
I shall have a velocipede . . .

So I go all alone: I don't know that nurse is just a little behind me . . .
I go alone, and spend hours in a dream, among alien children,
Frightfully little and strange and friendless . . .
Playing with blocks and bright coloured strips of paper . . .

"Teacher, may I go to the toilet?"
Yes, I may go . . . I wander about the Normal School basement, and find a door,
And enter . . . it is a toilet . . .

A gong sounds: there is a great feminine chatter: and in rush a clutter of High School girls . . .
They gather about me and giggle and button me up . . .

I am amazed, but not too amazed to know I got into the wrong place . . .

AT 5

Elsa and I play house . . .
We are mother and father: she tends to all the babies and
woman-things,
And I go to business and come back in the evening . . .
Ramsey, who is humble and quiet, is our servant . . .
Our menial, butler, maid and nurse . . .

We take chairs, and roof them with boards and table-tops from
wall to wall of the top-floor room . . .
In the center, a chair with a footstool on it is a stairway to the
second floor . . .
Elsa and I live on the second floor, Ramsey dwells in the base-
ment . . .
It is correct that the lower classes should live in the dark-
ness . . .

Ramsey complains, but we are imperative, and attend to
weighty matters upstairs . . .
But then unfortunately the house collapses and our servant is
buried in the ruins and we on top of him . . .
He strikes: we have our servant troubles thereafter . . .

AT 5

We are at Sheepshead Bay in a large hotel . . .
Ramsey and I go out on a floating wharf and sail a toy boat . . .
It swoops beyond our reach, we lean over and lose our balance and are plunged in the brine . . .
We have to be fished out and go home for a spanking . . .

I am sad and subdued that wonderful summer evening . . .
A great golden moon rises over the roofs and looks squarely in at my window . . .
I whisper to Ramsey: "See . . . that's God" . . .

Comforted by a god I lie in the golden floods of light and float off to sleep . . .

AT 6

This is Sheepshead Bay, and still winter . . .
It is shortly after my father's death,
And my brother and I go to the rough public school where I
fall in love with the teacher . . .

And one afternoon some little boys invite us to their house . . .
I am dimly in it, some bizarre stuffiness of lace-curtains and
bric-a-brac,
And these tough little worldly boys . . .

And as in a trance I hear these boys knocking asunder the
world I lived in
And opening up a larger world of mystery and passion . . .
And yet as soon as I see this larger world I know it is mine
also . . .

Men do it with women, they say, and men do it with men,
And boys with girls, and boys with boys,
And it's very nice and lots of fun . . .
And some fellows do it all by themselves . . .

And they give some vivid descriptions, and hand out lumps
of evil-smelling cocoanut candy,
The eating of which fascinates and sickens me . . .

Shortly thereafter my mother asks me to draw a picture,
And there is a strange half-sterile inspiration,

And I draw a saílor on the mast of a ship,
And become dizzy and stomach-sick, and have to be helped to
a couch . . .

So there is a curious beginning of that conception and giving
birth
Which later shall be my art.

AT 6

My first friend!
My little brother Ramsey is saucer-eyed and thin,
But we are blood-brothers in mystery and maleness,
Fiercely against women . . .
He is five and I a little over six . . .

Our family is in Lakewood of the pines, in the house of an undertaker . . .
There was a burglary here lately, which fills my nights with terror,
And there are coffins a-making, with fine hammering, out in the stable . . .

Ramsey and I sleep together: we steal and hoard food and eat it together:
We form the N.S., the Night Society:
We have secrets together guarded from adults and children . . .
We have signal-words and love the woods and strange places . . .
In the backyard we dig in the ground hoping to strike a buried treasure and fearful of falling through to China . . .

In the woods one day, I stumble on a curious root-clump and pick it up . . .
It looks like a Bear . . .
With my penknife I whittle it to increase the likeness . . .

Our tribe has found its Totem . . .

Now awakes in us something primeval and mystic and full of grandeur . . .
The Bear is our God, and we worship our God . . .
We keep him in a pasteboard baseball box hidden in sawdust . . .
Only behind locked doors do we take him out, and set him before us, and reverence him with our souls . . .

He is Magic: he brings power, fertility, luck . . .

Then, one day, my practical eldest sister discovers the Bear
And throws him away . . .
Ramsey and I never recover from the blow . . .
Our religion has been smitten at the source . . .
I yearn as much for that Bear through months and years
As I yearn for my dead father.

We friends share the sorrow, however,
And in our sorrow the strength of friendship is revealed to us,
And this friendship becomes for me the archetype of the perfect friendship of the later day.

AT 12

There is a spaciousness of silence
In those respectable brown-stone streets
That border Central Park . . .
This nun-like island of stone in the brawling city
Is chaste, subdued, well-dressed, indoors . . .
Neither crime nor sin nor cold nor hunger nor nature
Has entrance here . . .

Here I am marooned for a winter, with my grandparents and uncles . . .
Mother and the children are south, and I, the trouble-maker, am left behind . . .
I go to a private school, and to dancing school, and am more respectable than I ever was before
Or ever shall be again . . .

Strange, long, vast-shadowed winter!
Opposite is an orphan asylum, with now and then a peering face at a window . . .
I shudder to think of a lock-step childhood in uniform . . .
I read Little Women, but hide such a sissy book from my uncles . . .
I practise piano in the great dark marble-tiled hall
And sweat with terror lest a burglar seize me from behind . . .

My Grandmother is my friend: she is little, about my own size: very wise and sweet . . .

I have a great theory: I tell her that gentle persuasion works with children better than violence . . .
She agrees with me, so I trust her to the limit . . .
Then, one day, I am impudent and she slaps me in the face . . .
That slap still stuns me when I think of it . . .

Losh! what good German pastry she bakes of Fridays! . . .
How fragrant and spicy and shining is the ground-floor kitchen . . .
And the servants—how friendly and comfortable they are . . .

When all go out at night, and I am shut out of the kitchen floor with the big lonely house about me,
I call up the servants, and they bring their beaux, and I sit shyly and listen and laugh . . .
And when I must go to bed, Nora goes up with me,
And at times even lies down at the foot of the bed to keep me company . . .

How I wish I might hug her: I am all aching for a woman . . .

One day in the private school I call a girl a big fool;
The children are gathered in a row and the teacher tells me publicly to apologize or I shall be dismissed . . .
I speak up stoutly: "But she is a big fool;
And George Washington couldn't tell a lie, and neither can I" . . .

So I am out of that school, and go to public school,
After an interlude with a tutor . . .

I have dear squat Teutonic Professor Paul to teach me . . .
He is very fond of me, and teaches me about rhythm and rhyme . . .

I astound him with an inspired song, "The Shipwreck,"
It ends dramatically:

> "There came a sound like distant thunder:
> The vessel struck, and all went under . . .
>
> Where were the women in this commotion?
> Corpses in the dreary ocean!"

I am sick: he cheers me: he will paint a picture of cherubs to hang on my wall . . .
For days I lie there dreaming of those cherubs,
But he forgets his promise . . . an unfilled blank lies for months in my heart . . .

In the dancing school, I fall in love with a curly-haired girl . . .
She dances the skirt-dance in an accordion-pleated dress . . .
She dances near me: I am swathed with fire . . .
I am invited by a boy-friend to afternoon tea to meet her . . .
We three sit silent about a little table . . .
This love is unspeakable, I walk in dreams . . .

One night my beloved darling aunt sleeps with me . . .
I promise her not to kick her . . . I lie stiff as a poker . . .
But what strange wonderful forbidden feelings are mine!

And Spring comes and my mother and the children,
And I cease being the "only child" . . .
My mother finds me a different being, polite, attentive, respectable . . .
I am mannered for at least three weeks, and then I am outrageous again, a young fiend . . .
She says tartly: "I knew it wouldn't last" . . .

AT 13

I am in love with my youngest sister: the stories are about her
and me . . .
I am in love with her, and I wonder, locked in with her of a
Ramsey, Helen, Doretta, Robert— breathless afternoon
Such is my family.
Why I feel guilty and flushed, hugging her
Mother and my eldest sister Elsa are in New York
But I have taken the four younger children up to a back-
country farm at Coxsackie . . .
And I am a little over thirteen
I fall madly in love with
The simple old reddish farm-house is set, peerless, in grass—
meadow and orchard . . .
these children . . .
Its simple and unspoiled pastoral quaintness
peace . . .
One hears no sound on a warm day save bees humming
stirring grasses waving
A cow's moo, a chick's cluck, a woman's voice
I am suddenly
ing of the spirit . . .
I am thrilled
Wee city children run loose
Twice of hot days we bathe and splash in the mud-bottomed
creek . . .
At sunset we sit at the farmhouse doorway on the grass the
farmer smokes his pipe
We see the earth dreaming of the loves of Spring,
And the sky troubled with other worlds
And dawn was reverential and grey with awe . . .
But in these days it is darkness we love . . .
We have two adjoining rooms: the three boys in the big one,
the two girls in the little one . . . . .

The girls have an old-fashioned bed, and the five of us in the hot night and in our nightgowns
Stretch side by side, I in the center . . .
And I tell stories . . . strange, long, endless stories of magic . . .

I am in love with my youngest sister: the stories are about her and me . . .
I am in love with her, and I wonder, locked in with her of a breathless afternoon
Why I feel guilty and flushed, hugging her and kissing her,
And why, later, my mother forbids it,
And why, sent then to take French lessons of a yellow-haired girl in the village,
I fall madly in love with my teacher . . .

But mother is far away: and I am the mother and father of these children . . .
For once, I am happy . . . I am nested among my little lovers . . .
And I am full of dawn . . . the sunrise of sex is turning my childish world into startling and divine beauty . . .
I am suddenly aware of a magic cry in the blood and a panting of the spirit . . .
I am thrilled with the colours and forms of the earth, cloud-puffs, apple-blows, bird-notes . . .

O what a dawn! Coming up in the river-boat, at five in the morning, I went up to the prow,
And there lay smooth clear waters of the Hudson in cool shadows of dark mountains,
And dawn was reverential and grey with awe . . .

As I stood, the child fell away from me, I had the first of my new births . . .

I knew now that to be human meant something full of dream
and fire,
And that male and female struck mad music from each
other . . .

So, lying in the orchard, under floating clouds, and clouds of
blossoms,
And full of honeysuckle perfume and sounds of bees,
A first vivid passion wrought ecstasy in me,
And poetry was born . . . I had to sing strange things on
paper . . .
My purpose and my life-work came to me . . . .

So this happy interlude between a dark childhood and a darker
youth . . .

AT 15.

There is a Boys' Club that meets of Sunday nights,
He teaches us ethics: he reads Kipling to us: he feeds us
Emerson . . . . . me . . . .
He tells us we must be pure and chaste . . .
We fall madly in love with him, for we are about at fourteen
or fifteen . . .
And when we are asked by our Father of Ethics to take another teacher
We are unkind . . .

This other teacher is a quiet spade-bearded man, an educator,
Who believes in drawing out children not drenching them . . .
But we are used to the vivid exhortations that dilate our spirits,
And this man seems tame and weak . . .

Father of Ethics comes to hold an inquiry,
And our teacher waits in the hall for the verdict . . .
It is I that get up and indict the teacher . . .
He is neither Yes nor No, I say, neither black nor white,
We are not inspired . . .

So the teacher is dropped, and our beloved Emersonian is returned to us . . .

Years later, that teacher that I ousted

Shall be another father to me . . .
Even then, he spotted me with sure eye among those boys
As the one who should go some deeper, darker way
Than the way of middle-class comfort, public position and
noble righteousness . . .

From then on, from afar, he watches my course,
Until our lives meet, and he sustains me at two terrible
moments,
And in all days leads my thought from James to Bergson,
Bergson to Freud and Jung . . . until I may think for my-
self . . .

I live in smells of the north and south, all gone briny:
The office is over the North River dock . . .
There is molasses, cotton, codfish, hides and animals . . .

I am proud to be fifteen, earning fifteen a week,
And a private secretary . . .
I got this job myself, in my first long pants;
I enchanted the chief clerk . . .

I am office-pet, everybody is fond of me . . .
It is stupendous to be down in that longshore world;
I love to watch the great labourers wheeling and wrestling and
straining;
I love the ships salt-clean and curiously cool,
I love the stove-smell and sawdust damp in the office,
I love the red river-front, the trucks, cars, chandlers, pawn-
shops, Beefsteak Joes . . .

In my heart, as ever, whether in business or school or love-
making,
I say to myself: "This is all very well for awhile:
I am doing this because I must know about life:
It is all for my art . . ."

AT 15.

I am fifteen . . .
I am Private Secretary to the General Agent of the Cromwell Line
Which plies between New York and New Orleans . . .

I live in smells of the north and south, all gone briny:
The office is over the North River dock . . .
There is molasses, cotton, codfish, hides and animals . . .

I am proud to be fifteen, earning fifteen a week,
And a private secretary . . .
I got this job myself, in my first long pants;
I enchanted the chief clerk . . .

I am office-pet, everybody is fond of me . . .
It is stupendous to be down in that longshore world;
I love to watch the great labourers wheeling and wrestling and straining;
I love the ships salt-clean and curiously cool,
I love the stove-smell and sawdust damp in the office,
I love the red river-front, the trucks, cars, chandlers, pawnshops, Beefsteak Joes . . .

In my heart, as ever, whether in business or school or love-making,
I say to myself: "This is all very well for awhile:
I am doing this because I must know about life:
It is all for my art . . ."

And so I try to get local colour . . .
I go eat in the Hole-in-the-Wall, up against a shelf, with a three-cent mug of coffee . . .
I go to a longshore beanery and get steamed apple dumplings . . .
All afternoon I am a little faint and stomach-sick with my lunch . . .

My mother tells me to write longshore poems . . .
I do . . .

"Our bones are chilly,
The wind is cold—
(Swing your arms, oh, swing!)
We're working together,
The young and the old,
Working like beavers,
Working for gold.
Yoho! pile the cotton,
The rafters ring,
Work off the numbness,
Work off the sting
Till your pale faces glow.
Yoho! Yoho!
Swing your arms, oh, swing!"

I begin to philosophize: I write profoundly, "Life may be short, but the day is long" . . .
This poem is accepted by a newspaper: my career has begun . . .

Thereafter I a little neglect my work . . .
I write secretly: or if matters are crowding, I go lock myself in the toilet . . .

There I am at peace, alone.

When I leave this job at sixteen, the chief clerk says to me:
"James, you belong to a greater world than we do.
We'll hear of you some day: you're going to be famous."

All afternoon I am a little faint and stomach-sick with my lunch . . .

My mother tells me to write longshore poems . . .
I do . . .

"Our bones are chilly,
The wind is cold—
(Swing your arms, oh, swing!)
We're working together,
The young and the old,
Working like beavers,
Working for gold.
Yoho! pile the cotton,
The rafters ring,
Work off the numbness,
Work off the sting
Till your pale faces glow.
Yoho! Yoho!
Swing your arms, oh, swing!"

I begin to philosophize: I write profoundly, "Life may be short, but the day is long" . . .
This poem is accepted by a newspaper: my career has begun . . .

Thereafter I a little neglect my work . . .
I write secretly: or if matters are crowding, I go lock myself in the toilet . . .

I am obsessed these days with relatives:
On New Year's Day Ramsey and I make a grand cleaning up,
We go all over New York to aunts and uncles and great-aunts
and great-uncles and cousins and step-cousins
And feel that the city is a cobweb of our Jewish tribe.

Relatives are always showing up:
And the minute they meet you they act as if they had grown
up with you and had the same parents:
They suddenly emerge from Grand Rapids or St. Louis or St.
Paul or Chicago or San Francisco
Or Baltimore or Pittsburgh or Mackinaw or Portland,
And mother must have a kaffee-klatsch and there is a terrible
jabber as two or three autobiographies clash together
There is something hot about Jewish life: dark rooms full of
fat motherly women:
Children that are as important as their elders and talk con-
tinuously:
Great worrying sharp-voiced conversations on sickness and
money,
And the doings of this relative and that,
And all close-knit in the warm communion of eating and drink-
ing together . . .
Something tragic about it all: coarse, worldly, but streaked
with mystery . . .
A sharp pride, a tremendous pride in bright offspring . . .

And I, flung so early among other peoples,
Breathing a freer air, feeling apart and curiously unlike them,
Stifle and smother in the days of enforced Jewry . . .
How did I happen to get mixed up with this?
My mother is not that way: she is refined, quiet, aristocratic,
Cultivated and intellectual, and has taken us about among farmers and doctors and teachers and other simple people . . .
Am I proud, or am I different?

I go down to Baltimore to my darling Aunt,
And lo, she has married into a veritable city . . .
One meets that family on street-car, in shop and park,
And on every street . . .

I detest it all:
I am faint with the fragrance and glamour of the stir of girls in summer dresses,
And I forget everything, but a summer night in Electric Park with my Aunt and Uncle
And my heart throbbing with desire, and the long breezy ride home in the open trolley car,
My Aunt close beside me, and I loving her and loving the touch of her . . .

AT 16–17.

Nights of old song:
Up on the top floor of his house, the Columbia student teaches
me poetry:
Room of a thousand books, how I love it!

He is later to be a lawyer: though I shall never think of him
as a lawyer:
For there is a sparkling sympathy, a wisdom, and a joy he
shares with all,
Spending himself for needy ones, especially for the neediest,
the Negroes . . .
What should I ever have done without him in the great practi-
cal crises?

Nights of song recollected!
My head always aches with the champagne of Spingarn's talk:
And through the throbbing pain I dart laughing after his flash-
wing'd thoughts
Borne on his soft laughter and the enchanting song that visits
his voice . . .
It is not poetry I learn, but the source of poetry,
The love which he conveys for the magic that is song . . .

Gates of dream open . . .
Many secret nights at home I sit echoing Shakespeare on
paper:
But there is an amazing evening, I am seized and over-
whelmed by a tide of the Music;

Greatness dawns in an illumination and a liberation,
And I know I am one of the poets.

Arthur, most magical of teachers,
It was you first took me to my great headland
And said, "There rolls the sea,"
And my soul answered, "My sea! My sea!"

How old you seemed to me then!
And how many years it took for me to remember you were
only a little older than I,
So that we could be friends!

AT 16–17.

I am starved for love:

I am so starved for love that the word "love" never passes my lips,

Street on a snowy day

She goes into the area-way of the house just opposite . . .

It is love at first sight for me . . . one evening in the drug store

She goes out as I go in . . . she is very pretty, innocent and coquettish . . .

I am charmed and stricken . . .

Sometimes I see her glance from a window: I even think she looks at me with interest . . .

I build a great romance in secret . . .

How shall I meet her? I have a bold design . . .

I write on a slip of paper:

"Can't exist on one smile a month" . . .

But then, my nerve fails, I do not send it . . .

So I go about, passing my mother, my heart thumping with my shameful secret . . .
For what would my mother say if she knew?

One day, my mother, in ghastly perturbation, calls me to her . . .
My brothers and sisters are there . . .
"Here," she says, "what does this mean?"
And she hands me the slip of paper, the "Can't exist on one smile a month" . . .
I blush to the roots of my hair and half-swoon with shame and horror . . .
"Nothing," I mutter and go out . . .

From then on the air of approaching tragedy begins to pervade the house . . .
I marvel at my mother's strong feeling, and am ashamed and sullen . . .
But six years later I shall marry the girl across the street.

AT 17

I have devised a stratagem for meeting the girl across the street;
Ramsey and I are keeping the house open for the summer: the rest are away . . .
And now it is Fourth of July and Ramsey is away . . .
I have the great gloomy, the empty menacing house to myself . . .

So I invite the girl's little sister over, and she brings her friends,
And we have a sticky taffy-pull on the gas-stove in the hot summer afternoon . . .
Late in the afternoon I sit alone on the stoop, smoking,
The empty house on my back . . .

Children are playing in the gutter, wagons pass,
The cable cars thump along the avenue,
The stoops are thick and dark with families . . .

The stratagem works: out of pity the elder sister of the girl comes over to the lonely lad who was so good about taffy-pulls,
And I am invited to supper . . .

For the first time I sit in that basement dining-room, in glare of gas-flame,
In jollity of family fun, a bit Falstaffian,
And beside me sits She . . . I talk, true enough, but without being there at all . . .

That evening she and I walk down Lexington Avenue and
get a soda . . .
We talk everything and nothing . . .
The next night I try to kiss her, and am cast out for a three
days' cooling . . .

When Ramsey returns he is amazed and hurt to find his com-
rade, male like himself,
Betraying the sex for a mere girl . . .

Ramsey and I are keeping the house open for the summer: the
rest are away . . .
And now it is Fourth of July and Ramsey is away . . .
I have the great gloomy, the empty menacing house to my-
self . . .

So I invite the girl's little sister over, and she brings her friends,
And we have a sticky taffy-pull on the gas-stove in the hot
summer afternoon . . .
Late in the afternoon I sit alone on the stoop, smoking,
The empty house on my back . . .

Children are playing in the gutter, wagons pass,
The cable cars thump along the avenue,
The stoops are thick and dark with families . . .

The stratagem works: out of pity the elder sister of the girl
comes over to the lonely lad who was so good about taffy-
pulls,
And I am invited to supper . . .

For the first time I sit in that basement dining-room, in glare
of gas-flame,
In jollity of family fun, a bit Palstaffian,
And beside me sits She . . . I talk, true enough, but without
being there at all . . .

AT 18.

We are two brothers, and I the elder:
We commute all summer to a bay a little behind Coney Island . . .
In our boarding house is a man with a wax nose and a blind wife . . .
The boarding-house landlady is so fat she has to be wheeled about . . .
The food is bad . . . there are mosquitoes . . .

I am blindly sad, but every evening my brother and I set out over the long foot-bridge across the bay . . .
People are trudging: in the twilight the rockets break in the sky . . .
The sea-wind comes freshly in the summer evening . . .
We are soon with music and darkness and stars and the sea . . .

And on Sunday afternoon we are on the porch of the hotel along the beach . . .
The world is a burst of shine, vivid and dazzling . . .
As we come up the side-porch, we see, between pillars, the bright blue sea,
We take great gusts of wind through our clothes and over our faces,
We smell the cool salt in the hot summer air . . .

I am dreaming: I do not know it, but I have gone down to the magic dream of the Greek . . .

The everlasting rolling of the sea, the ever-shining heavens,
the ever-living gods,
And he, Narcissus, leaning over the water . . .

Such a yearning is in me, I long for I know not what,
Beauty again, and nakedness, and passion, and song . . .
Something removed from pink wax noses, mammoth landladies,
Commuting crowds, hotel porches, business . . .

We round the corner: and in the corner sit man and wife and
young daughter . . .
And I look at that dark girl and she looks at me . . .
And a mystic fatal flash goes through me, a magic love,
And we burn into each other . . . and I pass . . .

Thereafter I go often, seeking . . . she is never found . . .
I only know she is dark and strange and beautiful and
wistful . . .
I only know the pain in her face that is also the pain in my
heart . . .
I only know I have found myself in another . . .
Narcissus leaning over the water . . .

AT 19.

Now youth is devastated
And when I come home in the evening it seems to me that the brown-stone house is a windy tomb,
Cold, and creeping with a damp horror,
Silent with the unspeakable . . .

There is sickness in the house, and one must tread lightly in monstrous shadow . . .
My brothers and sisters are heavily sad at sight of me: they look at me reproachfully . . .
Evil must be in me, even as in the house our family lies under some ancient fate . . .

My dreams break, and my heart, as I come out of the blowing evening in the free streets . . .
To be nineteen, with one's spirit galloping the world on a wild horse,
Ambitious, passionate, in love,
And all life sexually dream-coloured,
And to have the ordeal of standing in silence before a sick mother,
Charged with her sickness,
And love and hate contending,
So that death even appears as a friendly escape,
It is so I share youth's struggle . . .

A pin-point of light in the dreary large shadow of room,
And my pale mother with a towel bound round her head . . .

I had promised to take my father's place . . .
There was nothing in the bond that spoke of my falling in love with a young girl,
Nothing in the bond saying I should seek a life of my own . . .

And so my mother and I are ending the great primeval duel together;
Shall the future live for the past, or the past go down in sacrifice under young feet?
Shall I live her life or my own?
May I blame her for her love and need of me,
Or blame myself for the cruel new life that kills old loves?

I love her for all that has passed:
I hate her for all that must be:
In a weakness of love I grow hard and icy and aloof
Instinctively fighting the first great battle of youth . . .

She has met the inexorable: not I, but youth,
And in impotence before it, sickens, and thinks it is I:
I am blood-curdled with my own impersonal cruelty . . .

This is killing her, she gasps . . . and I half believe it . .
I go angry to my room, and lock myself in . . .

Soon the house will be broken up: I shall go down to the West Side Settlement,
And know the first naked loneliness of my life . . .
The hot warmth of a big family shall be taken from me . . .
I shall feel very little and bitter cut off from the source and nest of my existence.

AT 19–20.

Old days on the West Side,
Old nights,
Summer nights when there was a faint Coney Island stir down
electric-lit Eighth Avenue . . .
A moth-stir, flame, shadow, Bagdad . . .

I am the uptown youth in the slums . . .
I am a moth myself . . .

I go to certain dark street-corners under the steady silent
explosion of pale blue arc-lights . . .
I am all one ache and yearning for beauty,
And beauty to me means the naked body of a woman . . .

And something more . . .
Some madness, some intoxication of passion, some wind of
cool music,
Something of the breath of sandalwood burning and of Circe
singing,
Or Arabian night of camel bells, laughing darkness, murder,
adultery,
And drunken lovers on a divan . . .

To me, shut out of life by dreams,
It seems that even to touch a living warm body would shake
me with madness . . .

I stand, timid, afraid . . . the prostitutes go by . . .
Their eyes, blue with electric light, seem alluring,
There is bewitchment of voluptuous curve, breath of perfume . . .
I send a dream upon them, they become star-like . . .

I nod to one . . . we are actually walking together . . .
I hardly look at her, I am flushed and weakened . . .
We turn down a mysterious dark side-street, we are in an entry,
The key turns, doors open, we are in a large dim room . . .
She is trying to sing, but only coughs . . .

There is a stale odour of cheap cologne and lard and soiled clothing . . .
A furniture and carpet smell, a smell of damp walls and broken plumbing . . .
A faint breath of reality touches and disturbs me . . .

I look at the woman . . . she is angular, tall and thin,
Her flushed cheeks hardly need the rouge, her bright eyes the belladonna,
She is a consumptive . . . my passion is repulsed and dies out of my body . . .

I become my teacher, the Christ-like Settlement Head,
I am blind with tears of pity . . .
I am all for saying, "Go, and sin no more" . . .

She sees I am disappointed and tries to excite me . . .
She grows pathetic: she tells me she needs the money . . .
I give her the money, and kiss her forehead, and tell her to take care of herself . . .

"Can't I do anything for you?" she asks . . .

"Nothing," I say . . .

"Can't I even strip and stand naked before you?"

"No," I say, "I only hope you'll be all right . . ."

I am satisfied: she sees a Christ in me:
She weeps, enfolds me, is full of sorrow . . .

I walk home, treading on air, yet a little abashed by the tragic realities,
I go to bed, chaste and spiritual . . .
And perhaps the next night I am moth again, flame, shadow, Bagdad,
One ache and yearning for beauty,
And nurse my illusions under the bluish arc-lamps . . .

AT 20.

I have been wrestling with the shadows of Teachers—
Especially that bald-headed, blue-eyed, fierce, denunciatory
little man,
Expert in ethics, the Moses of a new morality,
The powerful intellectual father of a small multitude . . .

I was just twenty, and as full of evil desire as a bad egg is
full of badness,
And I spent a September in the mountains as this man's
secretary . . .
The Devil! he out-Christed Christ. "Thou shalt not even
think of sexuality" . . .
I was indeed in an old Jewish household, where the father
rules and obedience is the first commandment . . .

But I say this man was powerful also in himself . . .
His intellect was like a mowing machine and his audience the
helpless grass laid in swathes . . .
Experts came over the hills to tap his erudition . . .
He was self-disciplined so that you felt the pain and strength
of it . . .
He was public-hearted, could be wonderfully simple and child-
like,
Had depths of tenderness and touches of mystic warmness . . .

There he was, a giant of goodness and strength: the last of
the Hebrews . . .

And there was I, wistful, lonesome, frail, be-clouded, weak,
A clumsy secretary, muffled in dreams, steeped in poetry . . .

I walked in sin: for I lusted after woman . . .
In sin: for I preferred loafing to toiling . . .
In sin: my nostrils ached for anarchy . . .

My sin was the mud that shining Virtue avoided . . .
And so I wallowed in it, thinking revolt brings freedom . . .
In the rain I walked through wild forests with a young woman,
And read my songs to her, and wrestled with her to see which
one was strongest,
And felt like a devil . . .

Yet, all the time, he was stamping me with himself,
I was fluid silver, and he the great minting press that clamped
an image on me . . .
Within three years thereafter I too became a shining Virtue,
And taught his ethics, and lived his morals . . .
And it took ten years of struggle to conquer that image . . .

AT 20.

I take special courses in Columbia;
In physics, I fail: I don't know what the teacher is talking about
And why he makes such a fuss about weights and measures
When the lazy sunbeam sprawls through the shaded window and the motes dance in it,
And out of doors the Hudson rolls by, and the sky is blue . . .

For I am inside a sick vision these days,
Drowning in a cairn or a tarn of Poe,
And soft with Shelley . . .
For a fine blue-eyed New Englander, a disciple of Lowell,
And bearing about him the outer coldness of that strange New England line,
And the whole code of chastity and ideal love and a misread Platonism,
Is my teacher in poetry . . . here, only, I live . . .

I muster up courage and show him my poems,
And he invites me over to supper with him and to spend an evening in his bachelor rooms,
Where all is soft lights and books and he sipping Benedictine,
And reading my songs aloud, and telling me I have the gift,
The divine fire . . .

I am overcome and exalted, for weeks I live in a realization of all dreams . . .

But somehow everything I write has the tang of Shelley in it,
Or the rhythms and colour of Poe,
Or my teacher's lyrical fervor . . .

And, besides, he tells me that when I feel a poem coming
I should take down a master and soak myself in his work,
And then write . . .
I begin to be suspicious: I begin to understand what is meant
by the "danger of becoming academic" . . .

I begin to see how native talent is corrupted,
And art rotted at the germinal core . . .

I revolt, and try to shake free, to save myself for myself . . .
But I am in such a sick stupor of dream I sit exhausted looking
over the Hudson,
And every day my head rages with voluptuous pain,
And down in the Settlement I am almost useless to the Head-
worker
Whose wages pay my way . . .

Riding in a street-car I look at the flaunting bold-coloured
advertisements,
And their crudeness sets up a dizziness in my head and a
nausea in my body,
And I clutch the seat, and sweat, and suffer . . .
I have become too sensitive for life . . .

So, soon, I shall desperately leave all this
And go South to give myself to my art . . .

AT 21.

In Georgia, there is a town called Cuthbert,
One thousand whites, two thousand blacks,
A public square in the center with a statue of Confederate soldiers,
And over it all the lush magic of the Land of the Darkies . . .

Here I have an aunt and uncle, and cousins: the only Jews in the place . . .
My uncle has the general store and extends credit to the "niggers" for miles about:
He is loved equally by black and white,
And attends all the churches, seriatim, lest he be accused of godlessness . . .

For five weeks I try to be an artist, a pure poet,
And sit, steeped in Shelley and Poe, writing my Leandro & Beatrice . . .
At first I sleep in the lonely side of the house in a great room:
But uncle, aunt and cousins are locked in two adjoining rooms,
After my uncle has made the house secure, revolver in hand . . .

"Niggers"—I lie awake terrified all night . . .
On the third day I surrender: for the first time in my life I admit to another that I am afraid of robbers . . .
I am taken in, to sleep with my cousins: we are all warm, a nested family, with a dim light burning . . .

The woods are beautiful, but full of poisonous snakes:
I walk there with a soft-souled minister who tries to lead me to Jesus:
I reject Jesus, but am troubled, and full of those sentimental tears that drop over modern Christianity . . .
Somehow that de-deviled, de-helled, denatured world of gentle goodness
Can't be squared with nigger-horror and deadly reptiles . . .

Soft southern seminary girls in white flutter at the college next door;
I go into cool Colonial mansions and befo'-de-war, dear regal antebellum dames show me their pictures and their flowers . . .
I am uncomfortable among the bluff friendly men who chew and spit and talk women and lynching and Democratic politics . . .
The South makes me languid, the early spring with tropical beauty of purple wistaria on all the porch pillars,
Riot of roses and hyacinth in the gardens, early cotton out of the red soil,
And the strange enervating too-lush, too-abundant loveliness . . .

I am sapped of strength: I feel that my art will grow prolix and sweetish . . .
The whole dream of being another Shelley grows stale and sour in my mouth . . .
The North seems hard with pines, sea-brine, metallic and granite cities,
A sparkle of sky, a ruggedness of earth,
And battle calls me . . .

I am sick of being weak,
Of idling with tears, of writing soft sing-song,

Of sheathing myself in the southern velvet that covers the claws
of a tiger . . .
I am suddenly enamoured of manhood, work, adventure,
common things . . .
I will go North and marry and make good in a job
I am just twenty-one . . . time now to be a man . . .

AT 21.

At 21 I am Private Secretary to a near-Napoleon,
Owner of a people's periodical, an automobile business and a suburban realty corporation,
With a model Greek-temple factory at Irvington-on-Hudson, tree-girdled, the cliff-walled blue broad Hudson rolling before it,
And his own mansion house up the hill for an office . . .

Out of dreamy youth into battle . . . I hate and love it . . .
With a head stuffed with poetry, at seven in the morning, ignoring the sun-patched river,
I turn from my lodgings up the hill to the mansion,
Climb to the second floor rear, knock at the door . . .

J. J. is yanked out of sleep, shouts "Come," I enter the door, my open notebook in my left hand, my pen in my right . . .
J. J. lifts a hand to a rack of papers behind his bed, pulls down a packet, and just as I enter the room
Begins, "My dear Mr. So-and-So, Your letter of the twentieth—"
I hobble, taking it down as I walk to my desk . . .

The stream of dictation has begun . . . it goes on irrespective of J. J.
While he gets out of bed, strips, goes behind a screen and splashes in an English tub,

Comes out, shaves, eats his breakfast, opens his mail . . .

His staff come in, trembling: he denounces them all . . .
He gets that complete expression the artist yearns for,
And I exult in his tyranny and brutality . . .

This man is terrible: a hustler, schemer, promoter, with large vague dreams for the people,
A visionary beast, full of prophetical fire,
With a picture of Napoleon on his desk, and also, I take it, in his heart . . .
Yet I see the agonized tears roll down his cheeks over an escapade of his youngest son;
I am snake-charmed by him, a curious warm magnetic voice, an almost southern manner . . .
And I alone am exempt from his profanity,
For when he tries it on me, I resign on the spot, and he asks my pardon . . .

This man releases something in myself: when he hurls a plate at his wife at breakfast and it smashes on the wall,
When he tears with speech his bed-loving son to tatters,
When he crumples strong men with obscene wrath,
When he goes trampling down his employés,
The great beast in myself sniffs battle with his nostrils,
And I become J. J.'s tool and love the hate I evoke . . .

I browse in his library: I take down the Joy of Living by Sudermann . . .
Out of a past of grandiose poetry, of English idealism, remote romanticism,
I plunge into the modern prose and the sting and bite of the open winds of actual life . . .
Ibsen shall come next . . . and I shall grow drunk on the art of reality . . .

J. J. and Sudermann put to sleep the idealist in me,
And for the first time the masculine, modern, hard, intellectual
realist, my ego,
Breaks through, crude, cruel, defiant, relentless,
And Christ gives way to the Man of Destiny . . .

Hereafter I shall know a man and a woman in myself,
And the two shall contend for mastery,
Until I cleverly blend them into Christ-Cæsar.

AT *21–22.*

We are three friends, and I the youngest . . .
George and I meet first: he is the eldest . . .
He was once a mid-western sheep-herder, then he did odd jobs,
restaurant work, cigar-making . . .
And last he was "converted" and came into a passionate
mystical love,
Worked his way through college, studied for the ministry . . .
He has the orator mouth, the public presence, the organ
voice . . .
He must mother large multitudes . . .

Then, near the goal, the Higher Criticism destroys his
faith . . .
He is no thinker, but a born lover:
He is manuscript clerk at J. J.'s . . .
Sleeping with him, I feel a warm magnetism breathe from his
body across the bed to me,
A homely ample fragrance . . .

I lead him a fiend's life: I am all temperament and whimsy . . .
His very solidity provokes my most brilliant instabilities . . .
He wakes at 2 A. M. and sees me writing wild poetry on the
mantel-ledge under the gaslight,
I come and go, flutter in and out, spur him and slow him,
I am rapid as a girl with him . . .

A newcomer enters the editorial offices . . .
George does not like him . . . "stuck up . . . one of these New Englanders . . . one of these Yale aristocrats . . ."
Well, he looks it: a bit of Emerson in his face . . .
And a fire in his eyes that Emerson never even dreamed of . . .
He is sensitive, yet strong, with a voice of tempered rich music . . .

The atmosphere of our one great tradition hovers about him . . .
The Emerson-Adams-Garrison-Thoreau air . . .

There comes a day of ice and demon's own north-wind,
The factory sucks in the cold and is bleak with wind-whistles . . .
My office is northermost: I sit in my heavy overcoat at my typing machine
And find my fingers too numb for work . . .
I ask J. J's eldest to give me a corner of his warmer office:
He hates me: he tells me, "no" . . .

Then the newcomer happens in upon me . . .
"You can't work here," he says . . .
I agree, I cannot . . . but I tell him what J. J's son has said . . .

He is out like a flash seeing that Managing Editor . . .
He comes back and helps me to carry my desk into the other room . . .

"How did you do it?" I ask . . .
"Oh," he smiles, "I handed in my resignation" . . .

And so there are three friends now . . .
And I shall find in friendship the one deep joy of the tragic years,

The one sustaining and enduring help . . .

He would resign for me, a stranger? What would he do
then for me as a friend?
And what may I do for him? *

* Arthur Gleason, died Dec. 30, 1923.

AT 21–22

I am with J. J. in the flat middle of America, hot and dirty . . .
A World's Fair, the St. Louis Exposition, gross miles of glass and brick and blinding sunlight . . .
A scented hunchback secretary is there also . . .
We work in shifts . . .

J. J. is covering the Exposition: he is to write a whole number of his magazine himself
And has ten days to do it in . . .
Never done before! The biggest reporting feat in history! American with a big A!

He breezes by me on the hot plaza: I run at his heels, my note-book open . . .
We cover miles of space and speech . . .
I am his poor but gifted wife: this prodigy of virility
Pours one steady stream of seminal speech into my ear
And instantaneously out of my hand the endless infant is delivered . . .
This is being feminine, with a vengeance . . . the man in me grows bitter and hard . . .

I hate America . . . I hate the tawdry Middle West, and the ignorant but not innocent provincials who crowd the trains . . .

The muddy Missouri disgusts me . . . the six-in-a-room lodging-house is an affront . . .
The Exposition is an exposure of American shabbiness . . .

Externality! externality! Goods, machinery, statistics, advertising!
The biggest on Earth, the fastest, the newest, the smartest!
Where are the cool wells in the desert and the quiet soul healed with drinks of silence and stars?
Where are shy and wilderness-wayward loves?
Beauty, thou belovèd of me, where art thou?

Ye Gods, I hate J. J. . . .
We have to take in a scenic coal-mine in a rattle-trap car . . .
Says J. J. "Is the front seat more dangerous or the rear?"
"The front," says the motor-man . . .
J. J. turns to me . . .
"Then, James, you sit in the front: my life is more valuable than yours" . . .

Is it?
Ah, J. J., two weeks later I come into your feverish bedroom
And hand you my resignation . . . now you may swear at me . . .
Now, even, you may tell me that I am showing the Jew in myself . . .
Your life more valuable than mine? Well, well!

AT 23.

I have decided to marry:
I get fifteen dollars a week, teaching . . . prospects poor . . .
The future is dark: I almost believe I shall never be an artist . . .
I live in a tiny room on Park Avenue,
And am on the outs with my family . . .

But I shall marry nevertheless:
Some deep need, some sense that I must break with my adolescence,
That I must go through the common, the deep, the tragic experiences of all,
That I must taste to the roots the life of the generations,
That I must explore the biologic and human mysteries that darkly house the dumb millions,
That I must risk all on darkness and duty. . . .

Three or four times in life this "Must" hangs over me,
This inexorable demand to leave all and risk all I have . . .

So the family is reconciled, and I marry . . .
I am stirred religiously: it seems a sacrament to me . . .
The woman and I are holy beings unto each other . . .
With clear loud voice I answer the questions,
And with passion I kiss my new wife . . .

Then, off in the carriage, on the way to the hotel,
I say suddenly, with acrid mirth: "I hate you" . . .

The young wife is stung to the quick: I must make it up with
her . . .
We forget that ominous beginning . . .

And the next day we are off on the Asbury Park boat
Floating away from the city: and peace comes to me . . .
The first relief since I ceased being a boy . . .

Down at the empty beach people laugh at us: we look like
brother and sister:
We are naïve and innocent children . . .
Married? Surely I am playing house again . . .

AT 23–24.

Perhaps you think it easy for a shy youth of twenty-three
To be head of an East Side school of four hundred adoring girls . . .
My report is: Not so . . . it is a life of fascinating terrors . . .

To come into a classroom and have a whole class say "Ah" out of pure love,
To scold intransigent tomboys and expect at any moment a sexual attack,
To be in love yourself with certain light and dark beauties, the stars among the clustered heads, and yet not betray it,
To have all the teachers jealous of you, and you afraid of them all,
To have to get up on the auditorium platform and show your thin legs that quake with fright
And then to have to speak wisely, sagely, authoritatively out of a mouth plugged tight with your heart,—
Give me my burglar on a dark night—but omit this . . .

A little Jew-lawyer, of large benevolence and nose, and endless assumption of wisdom,
Furnishes the money and the authority . . .
I am his alter ego: together we boost the lady Superintendent out of her job,
And I am installed . . .

I form clubs, I introduce an early soviet system, I speak of God and Darwin. . .

In short, I get into trouble . . .

The benevolent Jew denounces me from the platform before the school,
I burn up in the public gaze, as if I were being lynched with a bonfire . . .
This is too much: I resign . . .

There is a Russian revolt, not without Jewish female Trotskys . . .
I am called to the meeting of the Presidents: do I counsel violence?
My four hundred loves are ready to die for me . . .

I put on the soft pedal . . . but class by class marches spontaneously into the auditorium,
While the Board of Directors stands outside, looking in, trembling for life and limb . . .
I am called for: the school yell is given: I make a speech . . .

"Continue," I say, "the work I have begun by carrying it out in good order" . . .
I say good-bye: there is sobbing of anguish among the four hundred . . .

A Director shakes hands with me: he likes me . . .
I get into the street: a bevy of lovely girls swarms about me all the way up to the station platform . . .

I get home: I am bursting with exultation and exaltation . . .
I cry to my wife: "I'm bounced—I'm free" . . .

And so I am . . .
Never, thereafter, do I hold a job again . . .
I have decided to be a writer.

AT 24

I am free to write at last . . .
Every morning I go up to the topfloor room and lock myself in . . .
Then I break into a sweat of fear . . .

I tremble like a guilty thing . . .
I have been in the machine so long, I am naked and afraid out of it . . .
Every morning millions of people go to work,
They earn an honest living . . .
What right have I to sit in a room and play with rhymes?

Then, again, there is a fear of something inside me . . .
There is a supernatural fear . . .
I fear that Dæmon that rules the poet
And that sways him like a banner in the winds of inspiration . . .
I am afraid to let go . . . there is some taboo I must break . . .

But morning after morning I go in and lock the door,
And sweat, and fear, and stare at my paper . . .
The days pass: I have nothing to show . . .

Relatives are clamouring about duty . . .
A baby is on the way: I have no money:
How shall I look after wife and child?

I am a weakling, an idler; their worst fears of me are proved
true . . .

I secretly agree with them: but I have set my teeth and go
on . . .
I write light stuff and send it to the *Times* . . .
The *Times* begins to print: I deepen the dose:
They print on: I let go entirely: still they print:
And at last a new talent is blazoned forth in an editorial,
And the long career is started.

AT 24.

Yes, the child is coming . . .
My wife and I are full of awe, and not without fear . . .
It means a great imminent danger and agony for her,
And it means a complete change in our lives . . .

All of a March day we wait, and at twilight she is a stranger
to me,
Cut off in some terrible universe of her own
Where I may not enter . . .
I only stand dumbly and pitiably at the edge, wrenched in
spirit with the wrenching of her flesh . . .

And I am there late at night when the baby is born . . .
I see a human body emerging from a human body,
I see the eternal chain of existence,
I see, in the last physical blinding anguish a tortured girl
Emptied of a living being which had been growing in her,
And I hear this child wail, and see it breathe and move,
And see it in the mother's arms, peacefully sucking,
And her smile for me . . .
For she has come back to my world and includes me again
And asks forgiveness for the suffering she gave me . . .

And I am broken to shreds with a sort of pity for the universe,
And pity for us, and the mystery that strives through us,

The over-shadowing doom, our helpless coming and going,
And the dumb brute miracle of being . . .

I fall over the bed, sobbing my heart out,
Prostrate before the presence of the inexorable God.

AT 24–25.

I have pushed the go-cart into Central Park
And sit there beside the drive with my sickly boy . . .

I am so overborne with the oppression of black despair
I sit, lost in a daze . . .
I cannot bring myself out of myself to see the glow and sparkle of the green world;
Miserably I try to play with my son, speaking meaningless things . . .

Why am I so black?
Why does it seem so impossible to live among people,
To have a wife and be a father and earn my living?
Why is the child so sickly? Is he sick with the sickness in his father's soul?

What do I want? where shall I seek it?
Is it rest, or romance, or change that I need?

And then something comes over the child: he begins to tremble,
His face grows deadly white, he gasps,
He is wrenched with a convulsion, the foam flecking his lips . . .

My heart is torn open with a hot father-love, a despairing father-love,
I snatch him up in my arms, desperately looking this way and that . . .

An automobile is passing: I hail it: we race through the streets
home . . .
I carry him up the stairs into the house to my wife . . .

He is soon all right: but how terrible life is!

AT 25

Over the summer, my wife and I have my mother's apartment . . .
It is at least high and quiet in the sultry weather . . .
But we feel guilty . . . I am a member of the Socialist Party:
I attend meetings in back of a saloon in a density of tobacco-smoke,
I smell the smells of the workers in breweries,
And of girls who work in cigar factories . . .
I listen to interminable wranglings . . .
Is it a little like eavesdropping?

They know it . . . they begin a movement against the intellectuals . . .
I am surprised and pained . . .

And yet I belong there . . . if they need art and knowledge,
It is I need something of earth, something primitive and crude . . .

They would repress what they lack through repressing me,
I would gain what I lack through joining them . . .

So I feel guilty about a large apartment for only three people,
And my guilt and shame are deep . . .

But deeper than guilt and shame is the trouble of life . . .
What are my wife and I but ignorant helpless children at the mercy of blundering doctors?

Our child has been sick since birth, and there has been not
a night of rest,
We are thin, pale, and exhausted: we wonder how children
are ever brought up . . .

And our love for that child is something really to fear,
It is so poignant, so sharp . . .
If anything should happen to him, what will happen to us?

I am so tired I cannot work: and I must work:
We are out of money, we are faced with dribbling loans and
horror of dependence . . .
I write poor stuff: it does not sell: we grow despairing . . .
Then one day a Catholic paper takes a story
And saves us with seventy-five dollars . . .

But our boy? As I wheel him in his carriage along the Park
People stop out of pity . . . a blue baby . . . a baby that
cannot live . . .
But he must live . . . a terrible night comes when the doctor
tells us he will have pneumonia,
And of course we know what that means . . .

We are left alone: we confront each other:
We read death in each other's faces . . .
And then from despair comes desperate strength . . . we rise,
and we swear we shall save him . . .

How? We do not know . . . it is mystical . . .
But we shall snatch that child from death . . .

We stay up in shifts all night, one sleeps while the other
watches . . .
Slowly the summer dawn breaks, and I lean and look at the
gasping child . . .

And suddenly his breathing is natural, he is sound asleep . . .

I wake my wife: we weep in each other's arms . . .
The crisis is past . . . the boy will live . . .

Thus are children called upon to be mother and father . . .

AT 25.

Wife, child and I are at Kennebunkport
In a boarding-house run by an old Maine sea-family,
Where we get young lobsters, and splendid sword-fish, and raisin-pie . . .

Pines are behind us: pines are along the road,
And a walk of a mile in the fresh-blown woods takes us out on a crescent of beach,
With horns of headland, and the great sea blue as the sea at Naples,
And the sky one crystal of blue . . .

It is a sea-place, and yet touched with the wildness of a forest-place,
And over the salty river lies the old elm-shaded port,
With its quiet colonial houses and the departed glory of Yankee clipper days . . .

And joining us, there come a young Jewish poet, and his wife, and child,
And we are all thick like honey in a pot . . .
Louis and I, marooned on the island of poetry in the modern sea of American commerce,
Hail each other like shipwrecked sailors . . .
At last we may bask and loaf in the sunshine of the Muse, our Goddess,
And talk our hearts out, and our hopes . . .

He goes over my book of verse, I over his . . .
We talk technic . . . I pull down my volume of Walt . . .
We wallow in Walt . . .
We lay down the rules and regulations of a great renaissance
of poetry,
We foreshadow days of natural American song . . .

On the Maine coast, in the blue and blowing mornings, we
dream those dreams
That usually wither in middle age,
But which, later amazing us both, are coming true . . .

For a great and hidden impulse shall sweep our separate
singers
Until, out in the open, there is a chorus
And they that were alone find they are among many
In a new age of native song . . .

AT 25–6.

Opposite the house where my father died
Is the house where I was married
And my eldest was born . . .
Between them Seventy-Ninth Street runs from the Park to the river . . .

It is Sunday afternoon, summer, a shower has passed . . .
The broad street bears two floods from the West,
Folks and sundown . . .

My young wife and I sit in the cool dark parlour at the open windows . . .
Upstairs, our baby is sick with scarlet fever . . .

The yellow light has broken from the late blue sky,
And the washed street sparkles with glass and brick and stone,
The summer air has come over from wet park-gardens and loam;
The street laughs to our eyes and nostrils . . .

Past us, the people go home, families, lovers,
Bare-headed film-wound girls, the tired children . . .
Folks in sundown, the holiday done, trudging by to their suppers . . .
The street laughs to our souls with the people . . .

And an old sense of the folk is mine . . .
I have lived this street, first one side, then the other . . .

Here I was the little child riding a velocipede down the pavement,
And here, after absence, a youth, rewriting Shakespeare in a top-floor room,
And here, a lover, signalling to a young girl in the house across the way,
And here, after absence again, married, moved over the street,
And here I became a father and learned to sing a sick child to sleep,
And here I lived with the simple people of my wife and tried to savour the humbler life of the city,
The workman's Third Avenue life, the crowded Saturday nights,
And here now I am writing stories of the folk,
Of mother and father, daughter and son, sister and brother,
Trying so to make of myself the good man,
The good father, the good husband, the good friend, the good citizen . . .

They go by me, the people who are shut in the world of the people,
The poor go by, seeming far from the troubled gorgeousness of the great who bind the ages together,
And far from my deep sad trouble, which is like a shining tear in the heart of which I sit . . .

Is it my sick child upstairs? or is it the sense of the girl who is my wife?
Or is it the past, the ghost of my father across the street?
Memories of birth and disease and death up and down the long-known houses?
Or is it the pity of time which always forgets the people
And remembers the great only?

Or is it that through it all runs pain, and pain forever,

And decay and sickness and dying?
So beautiful and so transient and so mysterious,
Bounded by silence and by ghosts . . .

An old sense of the folk is mine.
I must take my wife in my arms
And go down to the family at supper . . .

AT 25–6.

We have taken the baby to a camp in Maine . . .
The shacks and tents are scattered in orchard and field of an old deserted farm
In the fecund pastoral country
Watered by a broad salt river that pulses with sea-tides . . .

Here are sea-winds tinctured with clover and corn and new-cut hay,
And that shining in the air and that blueness and blowing vigour which is Maine weather,
And all machinery discarded, and houses—
We sleep in the open air, mist on us or night-wind, and, between boughs, stars or a moon . . .

In the early morning the dawn wakes me: I look out and see the apple-trees red-lighted and throwing long black shadows,
And the air is wine pressed from the apples, and salty, and hay-blown,
And the branches are alive with wings . . . I listen and hear
The ecstatic bobolink, and he drips lisps of ascending melody
Which at last carry him from the topmost bough and toss him up into the sky . . .

The barn is dining-room: front and rear doors are open
And one looks through and sees in a frame the green field, the blue river, the cloud-bulked sky . . .

And in this place are a hundred children and men and women
Trying to mix an early Christianity with primitive America,
A wigwam life, voided of tomahawk and phallus,
And soft on the bosom of Jesus . . .

There is a beauty in running and dancing children down green fields,
And children hoeing in the garden, and folk-dancing in the fire-fly twilight,
And children washing dishes and singing . . .
And it is strange to see the man at the head of the camp
A veritable Jesus of the wheatfields, tall, thin, in overalls, with the suffering, gentle, bearded face,
And exquisite musical voice, and a soul as simple as a child's . . .

The woman who runs the camp is a sort of Elizabeth Barrett Browning;
She holds up the practical side of this Christianity
And makes a setting for her husband . . .
They are Tolstoyans and make their living frc n it
Giving the children of the rich the benefits of the great religion of the poor . . .

My wife and I ought to be happy: we are miserable . . .
We are caught in long soft sentimental floods of tears . . .
Shall I turn to Jesus? Shall I share the general castration?
Perhaps it is some sense in myself, who have often acted the Christ,
That many false Christs shall come, and that a mask is not a man . . .

Perhaps it is the artist in me that will not have life pruned and prettied . . .

Perhaps it is the aching tragedy of that Jesus of the wheatfields . . .
For he is a born poet and musician, he has the throat of his father, a fluteplayer,
He is made for love and song: for him beauty is religion;
And he has betrayed his singing throat to teach goodness . . .
He has taken on a crucifixion . . .

I gather darkness within me . . . one night the adults hold a meeting in the barn-loft,
And our Christ tells us that Jesus Christ lived the life of perfection . . .
Something explodes in me: I rise: I say his life was imperfect,
I say he really did not know life . . .
He neither married nor had children nor sweated for a living . . .
What did he know of the real life of man?

Some years later that beautiful and beloved betrayer of the singing throat
Carries out a poet and singer's crucifixion . . .
He dies slowly and in agony of cancer of the throat.

AT 25–6.

Strange happy days
When I have become a teller of tales
And go about the streets watching the people, the markets, the shops, the traffic,
Athrob with the great romance of life,
The beauty that winds with its mystery the commonest sights, the plainest faces,
Sense of Deeps flashing through surfaces,
And something tightens my heart with a sharp glory of this that is human,
O never too human for me . . .

I penetrate bodies and take on their histories, possessed by ghosts,
And my flying imagination builds swiftly the passions and longings and details of days,
Quarrels, love-kisses, powerful ambitions, the clash and adventure,
And beauty shot through all with the jetting scarlet of life . . .

I become full, top-heavy,
The world in my brain blots out with its ecstatic reality the world about me,
I flee contacts, I make for the topfloor, I shut myself in . . .

O that not one precious drop of vision shall be spilt idly,
Not one darling phrase, one glimpse of beauty be lost!

I pull on my pipe . . . rhythm, rhythm of the lips where words are born!
I put my pen against the virgin white paper . . .
Fear paralyzes me . . . how can I meet the responsibility of that vision vouchsafed me,
How rise level to my theme?

But I press on . . . a false start or two . . .
And then the glory begins . . .
Who knows it, but the artist?
The flood carries me; I have entered the secret essential hot core of life itself;
The pages fly . . .

I tear off coat and collar, the sweat runs, I grow white in the face,
I sicken and am flung flat on the couch . . .
But I cannot rest . . . the flood carries me up again . . .
I go on . . . it runs to four hours of madness . . . the story is done . . .

These are my true prose days
Before I must begin to make so much money
That I write to write and not because I cannot help it . . .

When I smell pipe-smoke, those days blow about me, vigorous and hardy,
Like an endless golden autumn in the lusty city.

AT 26.

In a dog-infested suburb at the end of Van Cortlandt Park,
My wife, my child and I have a clean little second-floor flat in the house of a Scandinavian carpenter . . .
It is the first time my wife and I have lived alone together . . .
I miss the busy city: I hate the spineless, dull, unthinking suburb . . .
The only escapes are the trolley cars and the woods . . .

It is autumn: a grey glisten, a wildness of asters and golden-rod, a stir of dust,
And leaves falling in the forest, and the Earth returning into itself . . .

All afternoon I read Meredith's Modern Love . . .
And my heart is terrified . . . line by terrible line I see the truth about my wife and me . . .
The tragic poem strikes open my soul, and I look in,
And see that my own darkness has become articulate,
And my marriage is ended . . .

O, for death to end it all . . . how can I go and play with the baby,
How greet my wife?
She knocks: the woods are wonderful with autumn: we must take a walk . . .

In the grey air we walk, in the glisten of the dying year,

And my soul goes down to roots, and the roots like a tree's are deep in the Earth,
And I know the Earth is deep, and breathes from the dark Mother's heart,
Breathes ages of heartbreak, and men and women destroying each other,
And enfolds them, destroyed, in her bosom . . .

I am like a weeping woman grown big with child,
And in pain, but unable to give birth . . .
Evening comes: I lock myself in my study . . .
I agonize . . . I think of rain, rain at twilight, and electric arc-lights, and toilers coming out of a factory . . .
And I begin, and I write a story . . .

A man has beaten his wife, beaten her even the night their child was born,
And he has been jailed and has threatened to kill her when he is free . . .
On the night of rain he returns . . . she is half-fear, half-love . . .
Shall she keep her child in freedom or take up the dreadful marriage again?
He enters—the child ties them together . . . in woman's weakness she surrenders . . .
He, too, is a child and she is incapable of freedom when a child calls her . . .

It is so that I determine that not even the truth that I know
Shall break up my marriage . . . I give in to my mother-weakness of very pity for wife, child and myself . . .
This is my renunciation . . .

My wife, in bed, reads the story, and it seems so vivid she believes that rain is dashing against the windows:

I am happy and peaceful with her . . . I am content . . .

Some years must pass before the truth, revealed so cruelly,
Shall break open upon us like a long hidden wound,
And destroy our marriage before our eyes, as we stand like
helpless victims looking on.

AT 27.

Talk!
My friend and I lie on the cliffs of the Palisades . . .
And talk!

We have recovered one of the secrets of the Periclean Greeks,
The love of man for man which is rooted in the body
But raised into contactless talk . . .

It is enough to be together, to share one another in splendid
speech,
To be like bodiless spirits together . . .

And such talk! Is it his gift or is it mine,
Or does the perfect friend-love strike open the very deeps in
each other,
So that we are amazed to have the tang of the ages in our
breath,
To issue forth art, recitatives of rhythmed speech . . .

Did the Mermaid hear such things? the Grove of Athens?
Did Goethe and Schiller speak thus together?
We have revealed, not ourselves to each other, but the race of
men,
The panorama'd world, the cyclic histories,
And so, broken open, each goes home to his desk,
And snares echoes and overtones in verse and prose . . .

So we perform the office of the Logos for each other,
The divine impregnator,
And so, in bodiless love, we bear children to one another . . .

The wind of Spring blows over the Palisades,
The ruffled river sweeps far below down past the white tall city,
The grasses are sun-running, the bushes vibrate and crackle with the breeze,
Sparrows are chirping, steam goes up from the soil,
We lie side by side like belated Greeks, pulling on our pipes,
Talking, talking.

AT 27.

The wife and child have returned home: I am alone in Pittsburgh:
I am gathering facts for fiction on labour . . .
I am stunned and strange in Pittsburgh . . .
For I seem to have descended without guide into the bowels of Inferno
Where the driven souls are lashed about by the invisible whips of engines . . .

The soot is in my soul, and my soul clamours with the roll of the ten-ton ingots . . .
I have borrowed a smoky office in the Loop
And sit in grey swelling gloom of the soft-coal air
Revisualizing the white breath of burning pits,
Weave of head-lit engines in clanking railroad yards,
Wrestle of waist-nude men like shadow-fighters with steel . . .

And as I write, the door softly opens and a young woman enters,
And Pittsburgh has a burning miracle in it . . .

We go out on Sunday by car to the rough heights over Homestead
And lie, with the holiday crowd of labourers about us,
And look down on the belching pipes and the acres of mills and the rolling freights . . .

This woman is new to me:

She is a social worker, delicate, soft-voiced, fragile,
With a certain dark beauty and stabs of intuition . . .
She meets my thoughts and feelings before they have reached my tongue . . .

I take her to her home: it is good-bye for us:
That night the sleeper will carry me back to New York . . .
We linger together, talking . . . she questions me on marriage . . .
Should she marry? should people be bound by marriage?
Could one love outside of marriage?
Is monogamy right or polygamy?

I see her face darken as I defend morality . . .
My soul darkens: I am talking against myself . . .
I am talking against a madness, a beautiful insanity,
Against a dream of a week of nights with her,
A dream of lying in the fires and smokes and thunders of Pittsburgh
Like Paolo and Francesca joined in sin in Hell forever,
Our bodies and lips triumphing over the ugliness and horror of America,
Mad love and abandonment, a dream darker than darkness . . .

But I am a moral man with wife and with child . . .
I say good-bye, and stagger away drunken and enchanted . . .
For three weeks I shall live in delirious agony plucking this passion from my heart,
Killing another part of my soul . . .

I shall humble myself to the engines and flame-mouthed machinery . . .
I shall know Pittsburgh in my bones and in my spirit . . .

I shall wonder often, dreaming, of the beauty wasted,
The dreams dissolved in America's soul . . .
I shall even see myself as a coward who threw away his treasure.

AT 27–28.

I am getting to be a popular story-writer,
And especially for one muckraking magazine.
I go by the hour and talk with the editor . . .

He is a born teacher, of the mystical absent-minded eye-glassed manner,
A Mid-Westerner, a bit rustic, a trifle homespun,
But, if anything, too sensitive, too subtle . . .
He carries about him the blended traditions of Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain,
And he is sure that the people are good and that the people are great . . .

All things have to meet the touchstone of the farmer's wife out in Illinois,
Or the just-anybody who chews his quid and sits on a rail-fence . . .

He is very fond of me, and I of him,
And I am released to a satisfying theory of democratic art . . .
No matter what you have to say there is a way to say it
So all the people will understand . . .
It is simple enough—of course, a sacrifice or two . . .
Don't be too gloomy, and don't be sordid,
Don't open the stink-pots and the lavatories,
Don't offend people's moral scruples and religious creeds,
Keep out of politics, and sex, and socialism,

Don't be a highbrow, don't end up in tragedy—
In short, uplift the people . . .

Now, since this pays, an artist can be both noble and comfortable . . .
That is, hang it! if he doesn't read Ibsen's When We Dead Awaken,
And Jean-Christophe, and Candida, and Crime & Punishment . . .
And if there weren't a strange discomfort in thinking of Walt Whitman
Sitting lonesome and poor in Camden . . .
And if in one's heart one didn't know the lie in it all . . .

When Demos is patron the artist is often a kept man,
The herd's darling or clown.

Sometimes my editor-friend grows mystical and wistful,
As if some discarded dream of his youth fell back like April rain upon him,
And I am depressed, I know not why.

AT 28.

Days of the dead soul,
Days when we had a corner in the sky on Washington Heights,
An eagle-eyrie in the north-west of the city,
And from the sixth-floor windows we saw the whole of the city
A sweeping plateau of roofs that rose in the south in towers . . .
Here one might see the pageant of light,
And the city taking its sky-baths;
Here one might muse on the separate souls that lived out their wishes under the roofs,
The tides of the millions under the skies . . .
One might look down like a sad god on the human race
Which had come from its natural home of meadow and mountain
To intensify passion and desire in a few acres of stone . . .
Which had fled from the gods and the devils and the animals and the seasons
Staking all hope for self in one another . . .
Which was used up in a colossus of machinery of which the great city was covering shell,
Which had little joy of it all, little good . . .

And unseen, above them, the seasons, the gods, the heavens went on in their courses . . .
One might behold vast destinies woven invisibly above the metropolis;

One might turn out the electric light that bound one in the room
And startling through the window came the blue-green tinge of a great moon,
And glancing out, one saw a string of lamps down the avenue,
And here and there a window-light, and shadowy hulks of houses,
And all the heavens sparkled with stars . . .
The multitude-fever folded in silence . . .

Or at dawn, holding my little boy in my arm,
We might see sunrise like a piece of music,
One note of colour after another rising to a triumphant climax—
A rosy flush along a scarf of grey spreading fanwise in the heavens,
And against the soft and deepening colour
A bird flying straight from the East,
And all the city lost in dim grey,
And chimneys smoking, a flight of ghosts . . .
In that gradual miracle my boy held up a hand and crowed,
Crowed like any astounded cock in a barnyard,
And looking, I saw sunrise in his face,
And pure joy and intuition of life . . .
And then I knew . . .

I saw it all: I could set it down in words on paper . . .
But I could not feel it, I could not share the wonder,
I could not break the bread of the body of the world
And eat of it . . .
I saw the bread, but my mouth was sealed . . .

AT 29.

My darkest hour:
I lie in bed, my lungs ringed with an iron band of pain,
A tightening band when I breathe,
And a great carbuncle on my forehead.

Now if I could die, if I could slip away,
My epitaph, "He also is a Failure" . . .

Life is too heavy upon me . . . I have made a brave fight,
Fought alone against odds of the world and against the devouring God of the artist . . .
I have known the omnipotence of inspiration,
Hewed plain tales out of the rock of life,
Poured song, and drained and lost my soul . . .

But to be an artist, what is it?
Vision and unreality, where pain only has the sting of truth . . .
It is to be a whimpering child unable to carry the day's load,
And then one darkens, and hurls lightnings and slays love,
And then one lies inert in one's own deep waters,
And then terrific battle and omnipotence and creation,
And one goes as a god who becomes a whimpering child again . . .

Better to end it . . . I am not of the heroic stuff of the great . . .

My wife reads Sophocles to me and Homer,
My soul floats back to the singer's home in Greece,
I have dropped three thousand years of fever for the cool
Hellenic calm . . .
Why write, when all is written?

Yes: I will put by the singer—
I ask for paper, and in my pain, through the long hours, I
echo Greece in rhyme.

AT 29.

I have turned from sickness and death
To seek my soul in the movies . . .
I still believe in magic . . .

All the players are spoilt sweet children,
They are spiritual dwarfs . . .
They play forever in a pleasure-house of the imagination,
And he who is king today is beggar tomorrow . . .
They need no masks like the Greeks: they *are* masks . . .

I am strangely troubled and sensuously happy among them . . .
Cæsar-Christ almost half believes he can play on the floor
with dolls and fire-engines . . .
He writes romantic melodrama for the actors . . .
He feels himself the Brutus of his Cæsar, the Judas of his
Christ . . .

His intellect rises like a spire in the vast glass-roofed studio,
for there is no mind there . . .
The players have jealous little egos, petulant caprices, im-
patient whimsies . . .
They cannot understand his abysmal darkness . . .
He cannot understand, how, when the gong rings, and the
director cries ready,
And in the painted scene the ghastly serpent-light inundates
the actors,
And at last, in silence, the camera begins its clicking,

As by a magic wand these children are transformed into the characters of the play . . .
So lightly they move from world to world of self . . .

If he is on the height, he must stay there,
And if in the depth, he is manacled there . . .
He who desires nothing but a looking-glass world
Is even alien in the heart of this mirage . . .

And so he muses on America which he sees as a movie-land,
A clutter of mechanism in which the petulant children play,
And he who is beggar today is king tomorrow,
And over it all is the touch of quick money and quick results . . .

A world of hot excitements and dull indolences,
Of dreams that are bought and sold, of palaces reared and shattered,
A world of daubs, masks, patches . . . of towns put up overnight like the scene in a play
And cast in the junk-heap tomorrow . . .
A bright forced artificial bloom that is partly painted decay . . .

He grows sick: in this original and native art,
America's art, art of the machine,
He seeks his soul and finds only alkali desert,
The Dead Man's Land of America at play.

AT 29.

There is a famous young actress in the movies . . .
She has black ringlets about her saucy face . . .
Her lustrous large eyes are black . . .

She is terribly young and innocent, the People's Darling,
And I am bent on trying to love her . . .
She plays with me a little: but always a brawny brainless
English actor keeps his eyes on us . . .

I am to write up her life for a magazine,
So she shows me her diary,
And I find matter there for close attention . . .

She is playing two men off against each other, and reckoning
on the returns,
She is diabolical in her schemes for raising her salary . . .

I look at her afresh: and I see a too juicy mellowness in her
youth,
And I marvel at what the love-struck youths and maidens
who write her from the Middle West
Would think of their darling if they read her diary . . .

Later, she shifts to a cheap company for a great salary,
Carrying her two men with her . . .
In three months she runs over the fat-line of the ingenue,
And in five months this star that shines like a Venus equally
over the Rockies and the Alleghanies
Is quenched and forgotten.

AT 29–30.

Lovey, our black cook, adores me.
Lovey is skinny bones, and looks like a witch in a wrapper and her hair spiked in curl-paper;
A black Medusa, snake-topped . . .

"La," says Lovey, "this here nigger works her hands off for the likes of you . . ."

She carries insurance for relatives and prays for their death . . .
She visits them in Virginia and comes back bearing in her arms a real honey-sweet luscious Virginia ham . . .

And it's for me . . .
"Ah lugged it, and wore the skin off my arm, and got a hump on my back for the likes of you" . . .

She adores the something mild in me, the poet, the dreamer.

She does not know me as my wife knows me . . .
One day I am at the telephone and suddenly a wild devilish fury possesses me,
And my speech has the lightning in it . . .

Primitive Lovey is caught back in the jungle: she recognizes
a magic demon . . .
Thereafter she avoids me . . .

Perhaps now she really sees the soul of an artist
Possessed of heaven and hell.

AT 29–30.

I have met our most powerful novelist:
We walk along Riverside at sunset discussing the ultimates
of life and death.

He envelops me with the mists of impalpable longing and
rainy despair,
He is so huge in his hunger for communication, so inarticulate
in his outpost loneliness . . .
Drenched with unsatisfied love he affects the swagger of power,
As of some heavy magnate, lumbering, large, a bit cross-eyed
and heavy-jowled,
Dressed like a model, swinging a cane.

He has, indeed, the eye single . . . single to the terror and
hurt of the world,
No multiple vision, but hard shortsightedness of mechanical
facts,
Fangs and claws and money and disillusionment . . .
Yet tears spring from his soul, overpowered by beauty, seeing
three girls dancing before a hand-organ.

I try to put a God in his brute universe,
And I think of him as a great tom-cat heavily sad and wistful
because he is human.
I feel balked, as if perhaps I too beneath my obvious optimism
Really believed as he did;
Especially, especially when he speaks of the life of the artist
in America,

The puritan steam-roller, the weight of clammy morality,
The need of freedom, however heart-breaking . . .
My soul goes black when he says: "You know for the artist
marriage is ruin."

He too has been in commercial work, he too is married,
He too is at the edge of a great adventure.

So we walk, we talk.
And here is the Hudson, the North River, with shouting gold
of sunset and smokes of the tugboats,
Shadows of cliffs, like the spacious threshold of a spiritual
universe,
And I grow tense with the wonder of it and feel the artist's
despair of ever setting it down in words . . .
So I turn to him: "Just look," I say, "could you describe that?"
He speaks carelessly:
"Oh, yes—that or anything."

AT 29–30.

It is about ten o'clock: my wife and I have already gone to bed,
When the bell rings and in comes white-haired Horace Traubel.

We entertain him in our bathrobes,
And he laughs at us: for him the night has but begun:
Meanderings through dark streets, adventures among strangers, comrade-gatherings in tiny smoky rooms

I feel shy and guilty before him:
It was he who saw Walt Whitman into death,
And he fought Walt's fight through all these years.
Horace is a printer, gets out a little magazine, writes poetry,
But mainly gives us "With Walt Whitman at Camden."

Sunset glow from Walt is on Horace:
One feels Walt at one remove.
The man is simple, unaffected, tender, with a naïve and utter faith in the people,
With a religion that has revolution in it,
And brotherhood and commonplaces.
He is poor, and uncompromising.

I feel guilty,
Especially when he speaks of the danger of being a ten-thousand-a-year man,

And how Jack London has gone bad as an artist,
And the taint of the New York bunch.

Horace thinks I might yet do something, if I am not spoilt.
He makes my heart ache.

AT 30

Why writing my stories do I go into such helpless rages against myself?
Why am I guilty before great books?
Why does Jean-Christophe fling me in a fever of despair?

O, I see now . . .
I see my whole life tossed between conformity and art,
Between compliance with America's Gods, Success and Gentility,
And the fierce demand to be strong and courageous and free,
A true artist . . .

I have compromised, I have sold out to look well in my family's eyes,
For crumbs of praise from acquaintances and editors I have betrayed my gifts,
I have gone against my essential nature—and to what end?
Misery: my own, my wife's, my two sons' . . .

But I am caught:
It is too late, I am too fixed in my habits; my golden chance was given me and I flung it away:
I have not the courage nor the will:
And am I really an artist after all?

I walk about the streets thinking: perhaps thirty years more,
Thirty years more of a false life,

And then deserved oblivion . . .
One more frustrated talent, one more divine possibility
corrupted and slain,
One more American life . . .

AT 30.

Randall's Island on a grey day when the East River races
foaming to the Atlantic
And the tugs ride by like supine souls carried by Destiny . . .

Grey barracks . . . prison cages . . . and blasted humanity . . .
I walk with the bright young medical, and a keeper of these
crippled beasts . . .
And we move in an air of uncleansable human staleness
As if when souls decay they give off the fetid odour of a
rotting God . . .
Here the spirit of man screeches its way into eternal
mystery . . .

What world is this, strange, yet familiar?
These babbling vacant faces, these beggars and kings and
courtesans and satyrs,
These crouching wailing animals using man's hands for feet,
These howling vision-haunted Christs,
These Gods prophesying for the world?

And why is the horror deepest in this artist who talks to me
so quietly and sanely, with a gay laugh?
"New York over there," he points to the grey dirty city beyond
the grey tide,
"That's the real asylum for the insane . . .
We, here, we are the sane . . .
You'd never guess it: yet it is so."

My spirit trembles . . .
I know that rapid river-tide and the soul supine in the drag
of Destiny
And the sea of madness . . .
Who better than an artist knows the Deeps, strange yet
familiar,
Where in the barracks of Self
One is God-drunk and God-damned in demonic ecstasies?

I am of these in the hour of song . . .
And I think of Nietzsche dissolving in the golden stupor,
And Hugo Wolf's shout that he was Jupiter,
And Dostoyefsky foaming in epilepsy:
And I think of the great who dared the frenzy, lost in the Lear-
storm and the Walpurgis Night,
And conquered and came to peace . . .

When shall I dare again the last madness, my deepest fear?
Or is it not better to deny and cast out the artist?

But I am an artist; I know my kinship with the blasted . . .
And over the tides in the ferry I go, trembling,
Wondering why I am outside, while they are inside.

AT 30.

We had thought that our second son would bring us peace . . .
He is so good-natured, healthy and beautiful,
A golden boy . . .

Everybody adores him; he is full of laughter and fat chuckles,
And hardy as a nail . . .

He just begins to walk, and is funny on his feet . . .

But there is no peace: the air in our house has poison in it;
Though my wife and I muffle our quarrels and lacerate each other in secret,
The air is heavy with a ruined marriage . . .

And one morning I hear the little lad calling me,
And I go into his room, and he is trying vainly to stand up, clutching on the rods of his crib . . .
But he cannot stand, he falls back, and looks at me appealingly . . .

I call my wife: something's gone wrong with his legs . . .
We wait breathlessly for the doctor . . .
Surely such things happen, but we cannot even think they will happen to us!
The doctor comes: he tests: yes, it is so,
It is infantile paralysis . . .

So there between us the golden fruit of our marriage is blasted.
And we a little see the symbol, the symbol . . .

AT 31.

Is this my wife and I, who talk so cleverly?
This is our favourite walk: the river road in the upper city
along the Hudson:
This our favourite seat: looking under bare winter trees
on the railroad tracks, the blue sun-running river, the
cliffs beyond . . .

We are almost happy: it is so clean and clear and courageous
to be nakedly candid . . .
For several years we have struggled in the hot passes of
desperation,
Drugged ourselves with passion and play, with comforts and
sicknesses and studies,
With friends and cleverness and cures;
But I have seen her stare pale from the window at one in the
morning contemplating a fatal leap,
And she has seen me lie sick and near death, and resigned to
death . . .
We have known that two human souls with most excellent
intentions
May commit every crime and indignity and shame on one
another . . .
We have seen our children tremble like untuned strings to
every breath of our distorted spirits . . .
And yet we have gone on affirming love, duty, the home,
marriage . . .

Now, as clear and fresh as the winter wind, is our witty
candour . . .
I need not worry for her: she will be happier alone:
Nor she for me: I shall go down to Washington Square and
be all artist . . .
We are free, our hearts sing, we are free . . .

A few days later, I say good-bye to the children and her . . .
Shall we kiss? Why not? . . . I go . . .
I sleep alone that night in a narrow hall bedroom
Feeling like one who is amputated and keeps putting out a
hand for the missing limb . . .

AT 31.

Isn't it strange, that though I am thirty-one,
I have never really been alone in my life
But always with friends or family?

Loneliness, like death, was a word to me . . .
But now I know the very loneliness of death,
And the death-anguish . . .
I go about alone in the city, all day, all evening,
I lie and cannot sleep,
I am running, running from the death that has overtaken me . . .

What have I done?
Am I the hero, breaking the web of lies, to obey the life within me?
Am I only the artist, impossible for a woman to live with?
Am I guilty of a gross and scandalous crime against society?
Am I a child, longing for safety and comfort once more?

All moods dash me on the rocks of myself,
And, late at night, coming home across Washington Square
I give a loud cry of agony . . . the wrench and sweaty throes have begun,
The death-throes . . .
It seems I must go insane before such emotions . . .
They are, beyond thought, terrible . . .

A soft January morning comes . . .
I go sit in an empty train of cars and am rattled through winter landscape to Coney Island . . .
I go down to the sand and the sea: I am alone by the sea . . .

I look out over grey-blue waters, and an intuition flashes . . .
My time has come for the sea . . .

In middle life we come to the sea, and must make the journey over the sea;
We say good-bye to all we loved, and now the crossing may be months and years . . .
We seek a new land, a new life . . .

So Dante in the middle of his years
Was lost in the woods of self and descended into the Inferno of self,
And climbed up through the Purgatory of self,
And ascended, at last, the Paradise of self . . .
The great crossing, the journey in the visionary sea . . .

And so, sea-gazing,
In the vapours of my agony I heard a little murmur,
It was a ripple of tune, a breath of music,
It was an annunciation from the depths,
It was the discovery of the sublime and terrible world of self . . .
And I a little turned to it, and tears came, and song . . .

I was abashed by the song . . .
Shyly I showed it to my dear friend, the comforter and comrade of my loneliness,
And he cared for it, and bade me go on . . .

So I went on . . . I wrote my Songs for the New Age . . .
And so the long crossing began for me . . .

It is amazing to see one's past like a receding shore
And to say: "I shall never return there" . . .
To feel the distance widening between you and it,
To lose it at last, save as phantasy,
To see the past as belonging to some other self
While you land on a new coast and almost in another world,
And you are not what you were . . .

So I see my life in the distance, its birth and death,
And it seems almost like the life of some one else . . .
I see it closed, yet I am here, still in the middle years,
And it seems amazing to have been all that, and yet to be living, with perhaps many more stanzas to be added to the song . . .

I am in the same city, and I cross and re-cross the same streets,
But it is not the same city and these streets are not the same,
For I am different . . .

This is the first day of Spring, and a Sunday,
The street, outside my open window, is shining on the north side with the sun,
The skies are a tender blue, a bird is flying along the roofs,
The air is indescribably fresh and touched with the eternal elemental sea and earth,
The church bells ring, it is Sunday morning . . .

I am idle in an isle of peace, for the book is written,
The song is closed . . .

I shall know a poet's holiday . . .

It shall not be long . . .
For Peace is afar and War is the breath of the artist's being . . .
When there are no more Gods to conquer, there are no more songs to sing . . .
I must grow as old as Prospero before I bury my magic wand
Certain fathoms in the earth . . .
March 21, 1920.

II

SONGS FOR THE NEW AGE

I

WE DEAD

BEFORE STARTING

IT was as if myself sat down beside me,
And at last I could speak out to my dear friend,
And tell him, day after day, of the things that were reshaping me.

He was not afraid to hear my deepest secrets:
He was not shocked at my coarseness and trivialities:
He was prepared for my hours of weakness,—and exaltation.
Neither did he judge me by any one moment:
He knew it as a fragment of the impulse that bore me forward.

Yes, these songs were for myself.
But when they were finished, other selves desired them.

Are there still others who will sit close by and listen?

Is it you? Are you the new friend?
May all be told to you?

LET NOTHING BIND YOU

LET nothing bind you:
If it is Duty, away with it.
If it is Law, disobey it.
If it is Opinion, go against it . . .

Beware that you worship no false idols:
Take no crust of manners or whimsical desires,
No surface-lusts and frailties,
For the real You hidden down beneath:
But dig . . .
Dig with shovel of will and engine of love and passion,
When the lonely day drags toward the lonelier night,
When betrayal and malice trip you and throw you on yourself,
Dig down to Self, and set God free . . .

Bethink yourself!
God is the Life surging forward creatively,
The swimmer in space whipping up a foam of stars:
Clear your little channel for him . . .
He is you . . .

Then, shall a law be greater than God,
Shall an opinion shrink him,
A duty stay him?

Forth! Let nothing bind you!

SELF

ONCE I freed myself of my duties to tasks and people and
went down to the cleansing sea . . .
The air was like wine to my spirit,
The sky bathed my eyes with infinity,
The sun followed me, casting golden snares on the tide,
And the ocean—masses of molten surfaces, faintly grey-blue—
sang to my heart . . .

Then I found myself, all here in body and brain, and all there
on the shore:
Content to be myself: free, and strong, and enlarged:
Then I knew the depths of myself were the depths of space,
And all living beings were of those depths (my brothers and
sisters)
And that by going inward and away from duties, cities, street-
cars and greetings,
I was dipping behind all surfaces, piercing cities and people,
And entering in and possessing them, more than a brother,
The surge of all life in them and in me . . .

So I swore I would be myself (there by the ocean)
And I swore I would cease to neglect myself, but would take
myself as my mate,
Solemn marriage and deep: midnights of thought to be:
Long mornings of sacred communion, and twilights of talk,
Myself and I, long parted, clasping and married till death.

WHEN IN THE DEATH OF LOVE

WHEN in the death of love,
The lovers part,
With saddened quiet in their eyes,
And brief low words,
They do not wonder at the autumn's dying,
Nor at the fall of leaves in the late wind,
Nor wooded hills in winter.

A sadness steeps the sky,
A greyness glistens in the air,
And the Earth's bosom is barren, bleak and brown . . .
When in the death of love
The lovers part.

WHERE LOVE ONCE WAS

WHERE love once was, let there be no hate:
Though they that went as one by night and day
Go now alone,
Where love once was, let there be no hate.

The seeds we planted together
Came to rich harvest,
And our hearts are as bins brimming with the golden plenty:
Into our loneliness we carry granaries of old love . . .

And though the time has come when we cannot sow our acres together
And our souls need diverse fields,
And a tilling apart,
Let us go separate ways with a blessing each for each,
And gentle parting,
And let there be no hate,
Where love once was.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

THE love of man for woman and woman for man,
It is not often love . . .

When the married couple kiss do they drink the music of each other's souls,
Are they moved to unspeakable reverence and adoration,
Would they renounce the world for the good of the beloved?

No, kisses are become to them a routine and a duty:
They find each other's bodies at midnight as they find breakfast in the morning:
And they fill the idle hours with games, shows, rides and liquor,
All to escape from one another . . .

I have thoughts of a love that might be;
Of a love that is the tender caress of forehead and cheeks with barely lingering hands:
Of a love that opens the skies at midnight for silent flight,
Flight far, with wings, in one another's arms . . .

These lovers shall mean as much to each other as they mean to themselves:
Their tenderness shall melt down irritations:
Their passion shall surcharge tasks with meaning . . .

Not alone shall the man find God in himself,
But in the beloved shall he find him, and in the sight of the beloved shall he adore him . . .

THE HAUNTED HEART

THE haunted heart beseeches me:
It cries to my soul: "Winter has come . . .
With what a withering the wind blows!
And the grey twilight is bleak, though the lamplighter opens
blossoms of white in the air . . .

"Wanderer, return!
Go to where the hearth is warm and the faces crowd:
Hearken to the calling of the children!"

So the haunted heart beseeches me,
But from my heart I turn my face
And continue my lonely journey into the sombre dark.

THE CLINGING ARMS

PUSH off the clinging arms!
There is only death in this strangle-hold; even if we call it
love . . .
The mother who cares too much for her child,
Or the husband for his wife,
They are keeping sheltered and confined what should be free
and hardy, toughened for battle!

Nay, there is no real love in this binding:
It is more often a sense of waste and futility,
And a fierce bickering and quarrelling . . .

Shake free!
Know love in freedom: know love in separation:
Give the soul its own self to support it, and take off your arms!
Do honor to the divinity of another human being
By trusting its power to go alone.

PROPERTY

MY life does not belong to me:
Neither does it belong to any other person.

Otherwise this chatter and comfort would be sufficient:
This ingrowing family life would be gracious and excellent:
This ease of the rut would suit for a lifetime.

But no: Earth and the heavens are in growth: and the sap is climbing through me:
I must go the way of the skies:
I must feel the star-tendencies and give myself to them:
My life belongs to creation, as a hand belongs to a body.

If then, my day's work done,
Time is allowed for gossip and the choke of families,
Gladly will I take my ease, and smoke, and talk:
But I shall not forget the business of the stars just above the roof of the room.

THE MORNING STARS

OF old the psalmist said that the morning stars sing together,
He said the rocks do sing and that the hills rejoice . . .

There be ten million ears in this little city alone . . .
How many have heard the rocks, the hills and the stars?
Not I, not I, as I hurried uptown and downtown!
I heard the wheels of the cars, the chatter of many mouths,
I was in the opera house when it seemed almost to burst with music,
I heard the laughter of children, and the venom of mixed malicious tongues,
But neither the stars I heard nor the muted rocks nor the hills!

David, of Asia, I do hear now . . .
I do hear now the music of the spheres—
I have stepped one step into the desert of Loneliness,
I have turned my ear from the world to my own self . . .
I have paused, stood still, listened.

THE SLAVE

THEY set the slave free, striking off his chains . . .
Then he was as much of a slave as ever.

He was still chained to servility,
He was still manacled to indolence and sloth,
He was still bound by fear and superstition,
By ignorance, suspicion, and savagery . . .
His slavery was not in the chains,
But in himself . . .

They can only set free men free . . .
And there is no need of that:
Free men set themselves free.

THE LAUGHER

STUCK in the mire of many philosophies,
Quicksands of creeds and codes,
I would have come to nothing if my soul had not laughed at me . . .

"Stupid!" she said,
"They speak of what *they* want: but what do *you* want?
Go and question yourself!
Surely the oak does not put forth apples,
Nor the wild-rose many-eyed excellent potatoes!"

Thanks, laugher!
I'm off now down the long road of myself,
The way is clear: I could shout in this wind of freedom,
Even as the sun rejoices that it sheds natural sunbeams,
And the sea that it runs down the tides.

PATTERNS

WOULD you lay a pattern on life and say, thus shall ye live?
I tell you that is a denial of life:
I say that thus we pour our spirits in a mould, and they cake, and die . . .

Thus, indeed, we become the good and the respectable:
Thus we neither lie nor steal, and we commit neither murder nor adultery:
But truly when I look at the holy ones, the pillars of society,
I am fain to go and get drunk or go talk with publicans and sinners . . .

I want to go to the man who quickens me:
I want the gift of life; the flame of his spirit eating along the tinder of my heart:
I want to feel the floodgates within flung open and the tides pouring through me:
I want to take what I am and bring it to fruit.

Quicken me, and I will grow:
Touch me with flame, and the blossoms will open and the fruit appear . . .
Call forth in me a creator, and the god will answer . . .
And then if I commit what you call a sin,
Better so . . .
It will not be a sin: it will be a mere breaking of your patterns:
For the only sin is death, and the only virtue to be altogether alive and your own authentic self.

THE PARADOX

THE wheeling heavens, at this moment wheeling:
The self-absorbed crowds in the street . . .
Gigantic paradox!
If they saw the sublimity of which they are part
They would hurry and hide, like children afraid of the dark.

WAITING

WHY am I restless?
Why do I feel I cannot wait here ten minutes?
From what am I fleeing?

I think I am trying to run from myself:
For the moment I sit still my mind propounds questions,
And presents problems . . .

What of it?
Let it ask its fiercest question: I will listen patiently.
Let it speak its worst: I can endure it.

THE DESCENDING HOUR

O MY most bitter mood,
O descending hour, plunge in the crater of myself,
And steep decline among flames, faces, torments, darkness!

I had forgotten—
I had forgotten the madness of life—
The blood-drinker, Time, was forgotten, the love-parter, Death,
And those gibbering ghosts, my ancestors.

Horror bore us: as if the gorge of Night rose, becoming worlds:
And on the inhospitable shores of the planet we were born,
And driven before the elements, and whipped, falling, to death . . .

We rear cities, crowding them with lights:
We try to forget with shows and busy toil:
But under it all the tide, the tide bearing us out.

SICKLINESS

HERE is strength, here,
In my own breast:
If I go whining to the Earth and the stars,
And beseech help of a sweet invisible one in the air about me,
Let me also go where I belong:
Among children and invalids.

Off with this habit of sickness!
Let me puff out my cheeks and blow away the vapors of sadness and downheartedness!
The erect pride shall beget a manner of triumph:
And the bugle of that manner shall call out the regiments of my tented soul.

ABIDE THE ADVENTURE

NEITHER from the woe,
Nor from the war,
Think ye to escape . . .
It helps nothing that ye shut your eyes, oh, cloistered cowards and gilded idlers!
For neither shall cushion nor buffet ease the sharp shock of life,
Neither shall delicate music in hushed hotels drown out the roar of the battling streets . . .
Neither shall wingèd wheels carry you away to the place of peace . . .
How can ye go from yourselves, deluded ones?

Make but a world of rest:
Swifter than striking lightning
The Aladdin of the soul builds in the heart
A world of unresting hell . . .
And, oh ye shunners of war, ye are gruelled in a war of the spirit,
In a battle of nerves and blood-vessels and the ghost-haunted brain,
And the death of delight . . .

Hence, whip ye to battle:
Live ye to the uttermost:
Abide the adventure.

TAKE PHYSIC, POMP!

I WAS as a sieve for the wind this morning:
I hurried to be out of it:
Zero weather, merciless and grey . . .

Yet there on the pave beside the park rail,
Leaning toward the brown frozen grass,
Stood one so thinly clad,
He bit on a wad of paper between his teeth to cover his lips and nose,
His jacket was stuffed with newspaper, his shoes with rags . . .
He was all puffy red and bleary and huddled . . .

At the same time he was throwing bits of stale bread to some sparrows . . .

A WINTER NIGHT

BITTER, bitter,
A night that kills with a perishing wind,
The cold soaks the tight houses, fighting the fires . . .

The air about the street-lamps is blue with cold,
The moon's a disc of ice frozen to the sky,
The streets are whipped clean of people: the wanderer blows
into the nearest doorway . . .

THE ITALIAN MOTHER

THE wind was so bitter that the Italian mother and child
were blown back at the corner . . .
The little boy cried, whimpering against the world . . .
Quickly the mother took her shabby fur from her neck
And wrapped it about her son . . .
Then they went on, both of them content.

THE HAG

THE old hag sat on the park bench, picking her teeth:
Her hat was askew over her stiffened bangs:
Her skirts were bunched together: her shoes broken.

What did Spring mean to her?
What meaning in the new grass blades and the cloudy blue of the skies?
How did the slow-rising love-hymn of the Earth sound in her ears?
What mate in the world for her?

I passed by, young and in power:
But I wished for a moment I could be inside her head,
And see what else the world means.

PRIESTS

PRIESTS are in bad odour,
And yet there shall be no lack of them . . .
The skies shall not lack a spokesman,
Nor the spirit of man a voice and a gesture . . .

Not garbed nor churched,
Yet, as of old, in loneliness and anguish,
They shall come eating and drinking among us,
With scourge, pity, and prayer.

THE ROCK

THE soul is an abyss,
The crowd is a rock.

Give me then the dive into the bottomless pit,
Thence to draw power and the strength of spacious life . . .
But let me not drown in those waters where madness lies,
Let me not drown like Nietzsche, scorner of mobs . . .

No, risen again to the surface,
I will go set my feet upon the rock.

ACTION

THERE comes a moment when to believe is not enough,
When to go on merely feeling and thinking is inexcusable . . .
There comes a moment when we must out and act.

For at the last
We must pass thought through matter, giving it flesh.
That is the act of creation, that only Life:
That is what the world means with its physical beauty,
And what our bodies mean, projected, solid . . .
Passion has become lips and arms, and the billowing seas . .

Many scholars have died of this malady,
Many dreamers have rotted in cloistered safety,
Much of greatness has passed, still-born . . .

TRANSFIGURATIONS

WE spat on the dirt and the flesh
Through two thousand years of soul-sickness . . .
And so the poor have been with us,
And the good people have been vile lies, holy and stinking . . .

Enough of this!
Glory is dirt converted, and magic is flesh transfigured . . .

Not to the heavens we pray,
And not to a white-bearded God, tottering and old:
From no far world does majesty descend.

But when we pray,
We pray to our own selves:
To no stars outward, but to one heart inward:
The little Self on the top
To the sea-vast world-swelling Self underneath . . .
And in that Self what is not?

There yawn the seven Hells seen of Dante,
There rise the circling Paradises to the sun,
There in the brimstone of lust, and fire of greed, and ice of stormy passion,
Purification goes on, and the making of all that is high . . .

Go kneel then in the pit of your flesh, in the darkness of the dirt:

There the wings grow and the desire for the sky,
And the fury creative . . .

Out of the noise of the world the musician shapes his sun-bursts
of music,
Out of the loathsome dirt the sculptor moulds his shapes,
shining, alive,
And out of the raw desire of man for woman arise
Winged love and the dream of the future and splendor of
song . . .

THE MILLENNIUM

ASK for no mild millennium:
Our world shall never be nobler than its inhabitants:
Never be nobler than you and I, blind brother.

What is this world but our secret natures opened and stamped into cities?
The smoke of the mills is only the vapor of our soft-coal hearts:
The slums of the poor and the drab palaces of the rich are the filth of our spirits:
The curses of the world are but the unleashed beast in us roaming the streets.

Here and there is one shining among us:
He is not a conqueror of tools, but a conqueror of self:
He strides like a sun in the crowds, and people are glad of him:
He did not wait for a millennium to perfect him:
He did not see the need of sanitation and pure food to help him to a soul:
He wrestled with the antagonist in his own breast and emerged victorious.

Give us a hundred million such, and a greater world is upon us:
But give us only a perfect world, and it shall be a coat that misfits us.
Stagnation and sin shall be there as surely as they are deep in our hearts.

FUNERALS

ONE would think the dead were burying the living, not the
living the dead,
The way we hold funerals . . .
Bah! my heart sickens!

Please, when I die, know that I am very well able to care for
myself,
And that the journey is mine, not yours:
Then take the refuse I left behind me
And quickly and quietly burn it up.

CRIME

HA! you count it horrible that the murder was committed,
That the man was killed.

What ails you?
Is it the thought of what happened to the body,
Or the imagined terror of the victim?

And yet, much nearer home, and quite invisible,
With sharp knife of words, glances, and even kisses,
A slow still murder is proceeding;
And the victim has, not minutes, but years of torment.
Far more horrible than any murder of the body
Is this murder of the life.

Do you guess whom I mean?
Yes, it is you.

TOO HUMAN

HOW many are strong enough to reject riches?
Not I, not I!

And who can flee from the poisoned breath of flattery?
And who can escape from the friends that shield his weakness?
And who can put away slothfulness and the lure of women?
Not I, not I!

We are too human, we little ones!
Praised be the hostile world
And the scouge of need.

JOTTINGS

NEW-BORN

DEATH and birth dog us:
I died only a few days ago:
Now, new-born, I send up a cry of delight at creation:
The world and I are so unstudied fresh . . .

LISTEN

Go a little aside from the noise of the world:
Go near to yourself . . .
Listen . . .

Ah, music, pulse-beats of Life, whispers of Death!
They were there all the time like a brook that is under the ground.

THE SEA IS ITSELF

The sea is itself: it does not fear to be calm or stormy, grey or gold, loud or soft—
Why have I feared to be like the sea—myself?

THE FLAME

What is the tiny flame of my match that gives itself so freely that soon it is consumed and vanishes?

THE SEA WHISPERS

The sea whispers to me of women because I am lonely for the love of women.
Now I hear the luring whispers of girls in the rustling surf—
Now bass of men's voices furious, urgent, and strong.

BREAST OF EARTH

Breast of earth, with all these sea-worn stones,
Tumbled together, grey, purple and brown, red and green and white,
What beauty within you . . .

SHH!

The sea put a finger of foam on its lips of waves,
Saying, "Shh!" saying, "Hush!"

I that was vexed and unquiet,
Heard, and was soothed.

TWO FACES

I saw the unwritten face of the child
Beside the mother's trouble-writ face.

MASTERS

I TAKE as my master, not you nor myself nor the past:
But Life.

Every chain I break is for the sake of the eternal irons:
I snap the links that bind me to you and you:
I crack away from the chaining appetites of myself:
And surrender to the manacles of the procreant Power of the world.

Then am I a careful instrument used ruthlessly:
Quickly may the tool break and be shattered:
The risk is enormous:
But better to be a brief tool in the hands of Power
Than be a weighty long-lived instrument rusting in your hands, my human masters.

TO THE PERILOUS OPEN

WE, that are the very waters of change,
Wearied, seek the unchanging:
We want a rock under our feet.

A rock of God, a rock of institutions,
A rock of indissoluble marriage:
The absolute.

And it does not matter if the rock has a nest of snakes upon it,
And is slimy and slippery, betraying our feet . . .
There will we stand, there will we suffer: our Rock!

But I—I will to my own, to the kin of my spirit:
I, the waters of change, will give myself to Life, that sea in flux,
To the vast variety, to the perilous open, to the stinging salt:
Strength must one have to swim: and I shall grow strong with the sea.

BEREFT

WHO can measure the agony of man?
There seem too many of us:
Too many millions: too great a multitude of needy beings:
Too myriad-hearted a need . . .
What sun, what rain shall feed this human grass of the Earth?

Alas! in the crowd I come and go, confused and wandering:
I cannot see a meaning in the tumult and disaster:
I cannot guess a triumphant purpose in this pinch of man-dust
on this hidden planet . . .
As the street-crowds run from my bereavèd spirit,
So crowds of the stars rush past, heedless of our trouble . . .
Yet it goes on:
Yet we have clothes on our back and food for our mouth,
And a thousand creeds pronounce their rival revelations,
And stout-hearted we go forth to fight in the morning
And lay us down at night, spent, spent . . .

All day they carry out the dead from the city, and all day the
cry of the new-born echoes behind the walls . . .
Youth is broken on the streets and the lovers part and the
married hate and long for an ending:
Child against mother, son against father, the strong at the
throats of the weak:
And every generation the annihilator of the generation that
brought it to birth . . .

Havoc and disaster,
And a going down to graves and a last dissolution:
And the bleak winds of November blowing up from the seas,
And the Earth dismantled and dying, dying . . .

I that found thee in my soul and in the radiance of the sun,
Hide now alone, bereft: cut off:
A few pounds of human trouble:
A little wisp of darkness:
A fleck of shadow on immensity.

TASTING THE EARTH

IN a dark hour, tasting the Earth.

As I lay on my couch in the muffled night, and the rain lashed
my window,
And my forsaken heart would give me no rest, no pause and
no peace,
Though I turned my face far from the wailing of my
bereavement . . .
Then I said: I will eat of this sorrow to its last shred,
I will take it unto me utterly,
I will see if I be not strong enough to contain it . . .,
What do I fear? Discomfort?
How can it hurt me, this bitterness?

The miracle, then!
Turning toward it, and giving up to it,
I found it deeper than my own self . . .
O dark great mother-globe so close beneath me . . .
It was she with her inexhaustable grief,
Ages of blood-drenched jungles, and the smoking of craters,
and the roar of tempests,
And moan of the forsaken seas,
It was she with the hills beginning to walk in the shapes of the
dark-hearted animals,
It was she risen, dashing away tears and praying to dumb skies,
in the pomp-crumbling tragedy of man . . .

It was she, container of all griefs, and the buried dust of
broken hearts,
Cry of the christs and the lovers and the child-stripped
mothers,
And ambition gone down to defeat, and the battle overborne,
And the dreams that have no waking . . .

My heart became her ancient heart:
On the food of the strong I fed, on dark strange life itself:
Wisdom-giving and sombre with the unremitting love of
ages . . .

There was dank soil in my mouth,
And bitter sea on my lips,
In a dark hour, tasting the Earth.

RENUNCIATION

HAVE we given up thy spell, Renunciation?
Do we dream that we can be born without first dying?
That joy comes with no pain?

Once the world heard thy lips crying: "Renounce!
renounce!"
Oh, calm-eyed wingèd one that hovers near us . . .
But now they preach of the unalloyed pleasures of the faithful,
And of the gains that fly to the needy soul all effortless!

Yet do I know that desiring my dearest friend,
I did not have him till I went from him,
Lonely for his sake through a month of days . . .

Yet do I know how songs are written . . .
The singer moves away from faces,
He goes from blessed comfort to cold agony,
Putting away the man in him to be the poet . . .

Yet do I know of a mother (so of all mothers)
Who could not have the child biding in her womb
Till, shrieking, she had given him up,
And from her body the small new life was sundered . . .
Then in her arms she held him: he was hers . . .

WE DEAD

WHEN from the brooding home,
The silent immemorial love-house,
The belovèd body of the mother in her travail,
Naked, the little one comes and wails at the world's bleak weather,
We say that on Earth and to us a child has been born . . .
But now we move with unhalting pace toward the dark evening,
And toward the cold lengthening shadow,
And quick we avert our fearful eyes from the strange event,
The burial and the bourne . . .
That leaving home: the end . . . Death . . .

Are these then birth and death?
Does the cut of a cord bring life and dust to dust expunge it?
If so, what are we then, we dead?

For, in the cities,
And dark on the lonely farms, and waifs on the ocean,
As a harrying of wind, as an eddying of dust,
We dead, in our soft shining bodies that are combed and are kissed,
Are ghosts fleeing from the inescapable hell of ourselves . . .

We are even as beetles skating over the waters of our own darkness,
Even as beetles, darting and restless,
But the depths dark and void . . .

We have found no peace, no peace: though our engines are crafty:
What avail wings to the flier in the skies
While his dead soul like an anchor drags on the Earth?
And what avails lightning darting a man's voice, linking the cities,
While in the booth he is the same varnished clod,
And his soul flies not after?
And what avails it that the body of man has waxed mammoth
Limbed with the lightning and the steam,
While his spirit remains a torment and a trifle,
And gaining the world, profits nothing?

Self-murdered, self-slain, the dead cumber the Earth . . .
And how did they die?

A boy was born in the pouring radiance of creative magic:
And with pulses of music he was born . . .
Of himself he might have been shaping a song-wingèd poet . . .
But he was afraid . . .
He feared the gaunt garret of starvation and the lonely years in his soul's desert,
And he feared to be a jest and a fool before his friends . . .
Now he clerks, the slave . . .
And the magic is slimed with disastrous opiates of the Night.

A girl was bathed with the lissom beauty of the seeker of love,
The call of the animals one to another in the Spring,
The desire of the captive woman in her heart, as she ran and leaped on the hills;
But the imprisoned beast's cry terrified her as she looked out over the love-quiet of the modern world . . .
Yet she desired to take this man-lure and release it into loveliness,

Become a dancer, lulling with witchcraft of her young body
the fevered world . . .
But no, her mother spied here a wickedness . . .
Shamefully she submitted, making a smouldering inferno of
the hidden Nymph in her soul,
And so died.

A woman was made body and heart for the beautiful love-
life . . .
But of the mother-miracle,
How the cry of a troubled child whitens the red passions,
She did not know . . .
Fear of poverty corrupted her: she chose a fool that her heart
hated,
And now through him no release for her native passions,
But only a spending of her loathsome fury on adornment and
luxury . . .
Ah, dead glory! and the heart sick with betrayal!

There is no grace for the dead, save to be born again:
Engines shall not drag us from the grave,
Nor wine nor meat revive us.

For our thirst is a thirst no liquor can reach nor slake,
And our hunger a hunger by no bread filled . . .
The waters we crave bubble up from the springs of life,
And the bread we would break comes down from invisible
hands.

We dead! awake!
Kiss the belovèd past good-bye,
Go leave the love-house of the betrayèd self,
And through the dark of birth go and enter the soul's bleak
weather . . .
And I, I will not stay dead, though the dead cling to me,

I will put away the kisses and the soft embraces and the walls
that encompass me,
And out of this womb I will surely move to the world of my
spirit . . .
I will lose my life to find it, as of old,
Yea, I will turn from the life-lie I lived to the truth I was
wrought for,
And I will take the creator within, sower of the seed of the
race,
And make him a god, shaper of civilization . . .

Now on my soul's imperious surge,
Taking the risk, as of death, and in deepening twilight,
I ride on the darkening flood and go out on the waters
Till over the tide comes music, till over the tide the breath
Of the song of my far-off soul is wafted and blown,
Murmuring commandments . . .

Storm and darkness! I am drowned in the torrent!
I am moving forth irrevocably from the sheltering womb!
I am naked and little!
Oh, cold of the world, and lights blinding, and space
terrifying!
Now my cry goes up and the wailing of my helpless soul:
Mother, my mother!

Lo, then, the mother eternal!
In my opening soul the footfall of her fleeting tread,
And the song of her voice piercing and sweet with love of me,
And the enwinding of her arms and adoring of her breath,
And the milk of her plenty!
Oh, Life, of which I am part; Life, from the depths of the
heavens,
That ascended like a water-spring into David of Asia on the
eastern hills in the night,

That came like a noose of golden shadow on Joan in the
orchard,
That gathers all life: the binding of brothers into sheaves:
That of old, kneelers in the dust
Named glorying: Allah, Jehovah, God.

II

WE LIVING

THE MAN SPEAKS

From *"The Beloved"*

YOU and I in the night, spied on by stars . . .
You and I in the belovèd night . . .
You and I within these walls.

A breath from the sea is kissing the housetops of the city,
Kissing the roofs,
And dying into silence.

Earth and stars are in a trance,
They dream of passion, but cannot break their sleep.
They pass into us, and we are their passion, we are their madness,
So shaped that we can kiss and clasp . . .
One kiss, then death, the miracle being spent.

Watchman, what of the night?
Sleep and birth! Toil and death!
Now the light of the topmost tower winks red and ceases:
Now the lonely car echoes afar off . . .
Helen looked over the wine-dark seas of Greece, and she was young.
But not younger than we, touching each other, while dawn delays . . .

Dare we betray this moment?
Dare we die, missing this fire?

Whither goes massive Earth tonight, flying with the stars
down eternity?
We are alive: we are for each other.

THE WOMAN SPEAKS

From *"The Beloved"*

OH, my being, opening into the dazzle of sunrise!
Where are you blowing me, trumpets?
What blast of music am I, striding the wind?

I took the hand of my belovèd, and I was satisfied.
I kissed his lips, and the stone of my heart became a song.
I kissed his lips, and was born again.

Love, now I know thee!
I have looked into thine eyes, Splendor:
I have kissed thy lips, golden boy . . .

Bear me to the ends of the earth,
Drown me in oceans,
Crush me beneath granite mountains:
I give all, I render myself up,
O thou, that art the breath of life: the whisper on the deeps.

BELOVED

LOVE:
To approach you with the touch the sculptor gives his clay,
Subdued, inspired:
To catch in the radiance of my heart the purity of yours,
White breathless fires:
To let the still sea of song in my spirit move toward its shore,
your soul,
With dying music: (Oh, hear me, adored one!)

Love:
To watch as one watches the face of the belovèd coming out
of death,
Every wavering of your lashes:
To feel each fluctuation of your yearning and your desire,
And meet it with caresses:
To enfold you gently until your whole soul slides into mine,
Conquering me with submission: (Adored one, hear me!)

Love:
To meet the dawn together and the widening light,
Seas in our hearts sounding,
To take from a kiss the glory of a dawn in our spirits,
And the arousal to living:
To rise from each other's arms magnified and mighty,
Heroic and human: (Adored one, hear me!)

Such may our love be: such be our passion, beloved.

ANNIE

IN the fragrance of her simple heart I still bathe myself:
For Annie was a girl of the people,
With eyes of the clearest brown,
And a voice low and sweet.

Her blushes were quick as her tears:
And the caress of her hand, and the "ah!" as she sighed,
Thinking she had offended,
Were as echoes of moonlit waters on a far shore . . .

Something breathed from her as deep of the womanly as the Earth itself:
I dreamt of hay in the barn, and slopes of daisies beside the road,
And the kitchen scoured and shining, and the hearth gleaming in the night:
Something so old and new, so common and magic:
For Annie was a girl of the people,
A darling of the Earth.

She said: "I am lonely, too . . .
I live in a room by myself and work in the day . . .
Three months back my mother died, leaving me lonely . . ."

"Ah," she said, "your brown eyes now!" And she laughed, and we kissed . . .
And over her face came a glow as her eyes met mine,
And her deep glance pierced me . . .

"Soon as you're gone," she said, "you'll be forgetting me:
And you'll take to the next woman you ever meet,
And you'll kiss her like you kiss me . . .
But I'll not be forgetting you ever in my life:
And how we met, and came up the stoop, and kissed behind
the door . . ."

"So," she sighed, holding me close by the hand,
"Go now: what'll I think of myself letting you kiss me?
It's my fault, sure: I'd never be blaming you . . .
Good-night," she sighed, and we kissed, and she watched me go.

Out of the Earth spring natural simple flowers:
Out of the people come simple natural women:
Annie, one of the sweetest.

THE LOVE-HOUR

WHERE may she of the hall bedroom hold the love-hour?
In what sweet privacy find her soul before the face of the belovèd?
And the kiss that lifts her from the noise of the shop,
And the bitter carelessness of the streets?
Neither is there garden nor secret parlor for her:
And cruel winter has spoiled the shores of the sea;
The benches in the park are laden with melting snow,
And the bedroom forbidden . . .

But ah, the love of a woman! She will not be cheated!
Up the stoop she went to the vestibule of the house,
And beckoned to me to come to that darkness of doors:
Here in a crevice of the public city the love-hour was spent . . .

Outside rumbled the cars between drifts of the gas-lit snow,
And the footsteps fell on the wanderers in the night . . .
Within, the dark house slept . . .
But we, in our little cave, stood, and saw in the gleaming dark
Shine of each other's eyes, and the flutter of wisps of hair,
And our words were breathlessly sweet, and our kisses silent . . .

Where is there rose-garden,
Where is there balcony among the cedars and pines,
Where is there moonlit clearing in the dumb wilderness,
Enchanted as this doorway, dark in the glare of the city?

A WOMAN FOR THE ADVENTURE

I WANT a woman for the adventure:
And my demands are monstrous, never to be met . . .

For I want first the body that slopes like a wave of the sea toward my senses:
And whose desire is for me, my least kiss fetching the answering glow:
And whose face, pensive in the twilight, sends my mind back to the legend of women,
And whose coming and going is as the footfall of the wind on a summer's night,
And whose words drop between pauses of music gentle and piercing.

But that is not all: oh, not more than a fragment of what I demand:
I want her to be the mother of my hours of weakness:
Quick will be the intuition searching to my need and my cry:
Gentle the healing of those caressing hands, breath of that soothing voice:
Deep will be the love that makes me whole again.

Yet demand worst of all: and paradox quaint:
I want the woman who stands father to the children of my spirit:
Yea, she who comes to her fulfillment through my vision and my works:
She who impregnates my soul with seed of her spirit,

Until there grows the life that through mighty travail is born:
Our work: our child!

Ah, you will say: not a woman, but a goddess I demand:
Ah, you will tell me I am monstrous, and so will not find her:
Yet, out with the truth of it! Such are the cravings of men:
Such the woman I want for the adventure!

WHEN A WOMAN IS WANTED

WHEN a woman is wanted,
What is the printed page, that I can idle over it,
And what the street, that I can wander it through?

The kiss in imagination is but whiskey . . .
It makes the thirst rage . . .
The dream of caresses and whispering love is but a beckoner forth from the prison-cell . . .

I want, not an image, but flesh and blood,
Not words in a book, but words that come living from human lips,
Not an exquisite description, but a raw sight actual and near . . .
Not an aching armful of air, but a crowded armful of resisting and surrendering woman . . .
Lips that my own can be pressed against in strong kisses,
Hair to fall down on my shoulders and tease me with its odour of sun-warmed pine-needles,
Eyes that can light and dim, fluctuating to the words and glances I send her . . .
Oh, one here, now, close to me, mine, as I hers.

How can I conjure you up from the millions in this city?
Somewhere you sit, dreaming, and empty, and sad . . .

Oh, how many thousands like myself brood in their lonely rooms and wish?
Girls and youths parted by narrow walls?
And who shall go seeking and who shall be found to-night?

FOLK-HUNGER

FIERCE hunger has come upon me,
And neither meat nor wine can stay me . . .
I am starved for men and women.

I want to go where the crowd is thickest,
Where the spot-light man colors the graceful favorite on the stage with green, then gold, then violet . . .
Where the audience roars at the jocose comedian and the strong stout woman . . .
Where I will be accepted, not by the Earth, but by my fellows.
Sinking back into rough good commonness, just a laugher and idler myself,
Warming the hands and heart of my soul at the blazing hearth of the people . . .

To-morrow, business with the lordly Earth,
Sessions with my Self in aching privacy . . .
To-night, crowds, lights, gaiety,
The cockles of my heart roasted as crisp as nuts,
And my lung-bellows roaring in the jolly brotherhood of the world.

ON THE WAY TO HELL

I AM so happy these days
That beyond a doubt I shall soon be booted out of heaven!

Long was the fall of Satan
And the landing dull and unpleasant.

Yet:
I lie and laugh at life:
I cannot get out of bed, for very delight:
And I say: Though you wait for me, Hell,
I shall laugh all the way to your gates.

THE BAKERY WAITRESS

WHAT face lifts, so perfect in profile?
Who speaks to the young men at the table?
Is it Minerva slipped from her marble?

But what do the young men see?
One calls: "Hey! kid! butter-cakes and coffee!"

Curious, how very blind these eaters can be!

IN TALK WITH A PROSTITUTE

I AM no sorrier for you than I am for myself:
We are both human beings . . .
Alas! both of us have come through the gates of the dark
And thither return . . .
Why should we pity each other here in the night?

THE CUP OF DEW

LATE, and lonely, and faint for sleep,
I yet will pause and have silence,
That the thirsty one, my soul,
May open to the night
And drink the dew . . .

I know that the day was wasted, many-tongued.
In noise and dust I stifled:
Over me passed a wind of words, and the world reeled.

But now I am alone . . .
Now space, and silence, and my body and I
Bathed in belovèd night . .

Dew of the stars and of the ether and earth,
Dew of my soul,
Fall into the cup of my beseeching hands,
That I may put thee to my lips
And drink the waters of great healing.

THE LONELY CHILD

DO you think, my boy, that when I put my arms around you,
To still your fears,
That it is I that conquer the dark and the lonely night?

My arms seem to wrap love about you,
As your little heart fluttering at my breast
Throbs love through me . . .

But, dear one, it is not your father:
Other arms are about you, drawing you near,
And drawing the Earth near, and the Night near,
And your father near . . .

Some day you shall lie alone at nights,
As now your father lies:
And in those arms, as a leaf fallen on a tranquil stream,
Drift into dreams and healing sleep.

NOT OVERLOOKED

THOUGH I am little as all little things,
Though the stars that pass over my tininess are as the sands of the sea,
Though the garment of the night was made for a sky-giant and does not fit me,
Though even in a city of men I am as nothing,
Yet at times the gift of life is almost more than I can bear . . .
I laugh with joyousness: the morning is a blithe holiday:
And in the overrunning of my hardy bliss praise rises for the very breath I breathe.

How soaked the universe is with life:
Not a cranny but is drenched:
Ah, not even I was overlooked!

THE NEW BABE

THE babe is the beautifully cunning dust that desires and breathes,
And through the soft pink of his body sing limpid sweet tides of life,
And at the light he is staring with wide blue eyes, unquestioning.

Oh, unawakened wonder! unopened blossom!
There I leaned, even so in my marvelous flesh,
But I and this body of mine were also as a pellet of dust
Dropped into gulfs of bathing light;
I, flower, drenched in the sunlight of the spirit,
In the spacious morning of the soul . . .

Divine is the unfolding and wonderful the opening petals
Of the babe in the storm and sun of the nourishing years.

HAD I THE WINGS

AH, had I the wings now,
Wings of the mounting condor to clear the clouds,
Clear the heavy clouds and soar to the day-dying sun,
To the sun, beyond these streets,
To the sun, beyond this lash of the winter rains . . .

But the day lags, binding me:
The day lags and my pent-up heart beats at its bars,
At its prison-bars beats, captive and dark.
Ah, had I the fire now, had I the joy now, had I the wings now
To clear the clouds of my rain-swept soul,
And soar in the heavens, sun-bathed.

THE BODY

BODY, whence come mind and soul?
"Ah," said the Body, "from me:
I am a tree, and mind and soul are the fruit . . .
Ages of fecund weather and nourishing dark experience,
And the strong sun of love and hate,
And rain of grey adversity,
Have begotten at last, you, loved wonder immortal!"

If this be so, my body,
I shall despise you no longer: but revere you and watch over you:
Flood-gate of the race: and shores of my sea of spirit.

THE SUN-CHILDREN

FAR from the sun over the ages and the spaces of the sky,
We children have come . . .
Far from the sun by strange spirals, and long trances and struggles,
When we lay a seed in the mud of a streaming Earth,
When we swam in the waters of hushed creation,
When we crawled out and dwelt on the land, in the grasses and thickets,
When we swung from the trees of the jungle,
When at last we arose and stepped forth on the immense pilgrimage of man . . .
None may count even by millions the ages
Since far from the sun
And over the spaces and whirled in the skies,
We children have come.

Whence, our yearning back,
Our yearning for the sun that at dusk sinks into the womb of the waters,
And at morn is born from the bath of the eastern sea . . .
Our yearning for the peace and stillness of the sky before the Earth was conceived,
Our yearning for the mother in the heavens and we but a flake of her living fires.

SUN, WITH A MILLION EYES

SUN, with a million eyes: spyer of every window toward the east.
Sun, that scorches our faces.
Sun: light and fire . . .

The flame you jet begets life:
All has risen from sun-fire . . .

I too was sun-fire . . .

The sun is in me: I jet him forth into a new generation: into speech, love, labor.

The sun rises and sets, and then arises again.
I rise and set, and my child rises again.

Thy fires in a woman and in a man draw one to the other:
In thy radiance we behold each other,
Or when the moon snatches handfuls of thy glory across the night
And spills thy stolen beams upon the city,
There do we see but wanly one another.

ONE FLESH

IF marriage is to be one flesh, this twain made one,
Then I am married to the multitudinous world:
I have passed through the hills and the sea, and they through me:
Star-light and sun-light have drenched me, nestling under my skin:
Yea, I have eaten of the sun when I have eaten of the fruits of the field:
And I have drunk deep of the ocean . . .

All parts of my body have been elsewhere:
In other people: or in the grasses: or in the cow and tiger:
Continually the stars rain their rays into the meadows whereof I taste:
I am a meeting-place for the tides of the waters of the world . . .

No wonder then I feel so at home:
That love goes from me to all creation.

AT HOME

THE world is wild,
And it is a stormy world—how the stars burn!
How the sea rages!

Every atom is fighting for itself: in tempest and fire!
Tameless and wild!

But I too am wild: real child of this gypsy Mother . . .
And so at home, at home in the blast of the embattled hours . . .

I COULD WRITE THE PSALMS AGAIN

I COULD write the psalms again,
I could raise on high a voice of thanksgiving,
I could pace the eastern hills and bid the gates lift,
Bid the gates lift that usher the dawn of the spirit . . .
For my joy is the joy unbidden, welling from the heart,
The joy of the Life that springs of itself from the inmost recesses
When in still loneliness self meets with self.

PRAISE

WHAT song shall I sing to the heavens?
My heart is bounding with music:
I want to pour out my praise to the everlasting heights:
For the gift of life is apparent: as with wings I am lifted:
And the love of my heart goes forth to the ends of the Earth,
And I gather the folk in my arms, and for marvel of life
Want to chant to the heavens praise for the gift and the glory.

DANCERS

I HAVE a notion tonight, that the Earth and I, locked in each other's arms,
Are dancing madly through the skies
Overcome with the sublimity of life,
While those whirling dervishes, the speedy suns,
Pause to behold us . . .

WASHINGTON SQUARE

STARLESS and still . . .
Who stopped this heart?
Who bound this city in a trance?

With open eyes the sleeping houses stare at the Park:
And among nude boughs the slumbering hanging moons are gazing:
And somnambulant drops of melting snow glide from the roofs and patter on the pave . . .
I in a dream draw the echoes of my footfall silvery sharp . . .

Sleep-walking city!
Who are the wide-eyed prowlers in the night?
What nightmare-ridden cars move through their own far thunder?
What living death of the wind rises, crackling the drowsy twigs?

In the enchantment of the ebb of life,
In the miracle of millions stretched in their rooms unconscious and breathing,
In the sleep of the broadcast people,
In the multitude of dreams rising from the houses,
I pause, frozen in a spell.

We sleep in the eternal arms of night:
We give ourselves, in the heart of peril,

To sheer unconsciousness:
Silently sliding through space, the huge globe turns.

I cannot go:
I dream that behind a window one wakes, a woman:
She is thinking of me.

SKY-LOVER

SKY-LOVER!
Embracer of the hiving stars!
The swarms of golden bees!
I feel the strength of thine ancient arms
And the power of thy going forth through endless night.

In the gross darkness thou hast spun a widening spiral of light,
Moons, stars and glowing suns:
But through these thou goest forth into the unadventured
abysses,
Chaos unconquered,
We going with thee.

THE FLOCKS

ON a downy feather of the dove, Earth, I lie:
The bird is flying down eternity.

Far out, and far under and over, the flocks of stars are flying as
in the autumn winds . . .
Whither are they winging? to what nests in what radiant
South?
And what echoes of their songs come to me,
And who is the gentle master of the homing birds?

THE TREE

HE sang as if the heavens held only two things:
God and himself.

Was his voice heard as the roving Spirit leaned toward the
Tree of the Skies
And parted the leaves of the stars,
And peered through at the tiny green blossom, the Earth,
And on Earth, the little singer, standing and praising the
Lord?

Yet here I am: the petal of earth swaying in an ocean of far
star-leaves:
Yet here I am, living, aware, and singing with loud full voice.

JOTTINGS

BOOKS

ONLY on the days when my life has ebbed
Do I feel the need of books to renew me . . .
But on the days when I am quick and pouring with life,
I turn to the book of the world at whatever page I happen to open it,
And read what never yet was told in ink.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

When I get there *once I told myself,*
The fight will be over.

But when I got there, to my amazement,
The fight was not over . . .
And I see now it will never be over, even in death.

EXILE

You cannot exile me:
Wherever you send me, my dear old self goes along,
Carrying on his back the bag in which all the ages since creation have thrown their winnings,
So that he staggers under riches . . .
How then can you exile me?

THE EDGE OF THE POSSIBLE

Vast is the city, concealing fires behind its walls, its streets and its faces:
So for the adventure I choose the spacious night,
And go forth marvelling at what may happen:
Tripping along, breathless, on the edge of the possible.

THE BAFFLED ONE

Not until you find a meaning in yourself, will you find a meaning in the world.
That is what ails you . . .
Your inner confusion you perceive all about you,
Once you get purpose into your life, you will see it in all life.

FRIENDS

NOW the day dies, and the workers trudge homeward:
They pass my window:
I see a few lights twinkling in the tall buildings, as if the evening star were reflected . . .
What hands are emptying the glowing urn of peace on the dark-wayed city?

My friend and I sat smoking in the little room:
Lightly we took the ball of the Earth and tossed it in talk to one another:
Unwitting the generation about us was held up to our probing:
Our hearts and minds were glowing urns of unthinkable riches which we poured for each other.

Is the evening so calm and tender because it has let go its full floods, giving love in its radiance?
As the evening were my friend and I:
We parted sure of each other: peace was upon us and serene love.

AS TO BEING MADE A FOOL OF

THAT bothered you, didn't it?
That prevented you from entering into strange adventures,
Especially with women . . .

After all, however, it is not so bad:
If that be the price of experience
Then I must pay it:
For to be laughed at, and to play the fool
Is cheap, by all odds, in exchange for the gift of life.

THE WRITER OF MANY BOOKS

THE writer of many books was weary:
"Enough of ink!" said he, "Enough of words!
Would I were a builder of bridges or a breaker of stones . . .
Then at least something real were done . . ."

Out on a lonely farm in Montana, at the close of day,
The woman brooding toward insanity,
Lit a lamp, and looked in his book: and the tears came:
And the ice-pack round her heart melted down in a torrent . . .
Blessed release!

Far in Texas a tubercular boy was plotting a marriage,
But he read the tale, and his heart broke in his breast . . .
"I shall not send my blight on the unborn babe,"
So he wrote the author,
"No: I am off to Arizona tomorrow."

In a New York hall room a girl was dreaming of suicide,
She read his words, and as to a call of trumpets her soul rose and went forth . . .

A seed so small that the eye misses it
Starts in the womb the growth of a human child . . .
Ye that scatter the seed of words, scorn not the sowing,
Nor the Master that sent ye out in the barren fields.

THE MIGHTY HOUR

THESE are the days of immense and solitary strength:
When to be alone is no hardship
And to go forth among men is a satisfying joy . . .

For I have found myself:
I have ceased to be ashamed of the things I cannot do
And have become proud of the things I can do:
I have accepted simple living and endless labor:
I have accepted peril and risk all around me,
And I have become patient with the world and with my own faltering.

I live with this moment, and suck out its particular essence,
Whether it be the bakery lunchroom and the shopgirls about me,
Whether it be some poor dull person stuffed with rich eating,
Whether it be stars over the snow and the sharp winds of winter,
Or whether it be my narrow room, and unbusied loneliness . . .

So living, I give myself to the purpose of the Earth . . .
I let the Mother put forth through me as she puts forth through the least bud on her breast,
I open the way for the rise of that sap and shape it for men and women . . .
And so I am what I was born for: and peace comes in so being:

And strength . . .
For so Earth herself is for me, and even the stars in their courses . . .

Is this egotism?
Shall tomorrow break me in the dust till my cry goes up to the heavens?
Shall a bitter cup come to my lips after this splendour?
Even so . . .
I yet shall know what is possible in the mighty hour,
I yet shall know that a giant sleeps in my heart,
And that after the despoiled days have gone over
Again. I shall be myself and live in that victory.

III

WE UNBORN

THE MOTHER

WHAT does the woman sing to the love-seed under her heart?

"Oh, my beloved, unborn,
Oh, lips in the darkness that yet shall be kissing my breast:
I send my life-blood into you,
And great love upon you:
Hushed in the pool of the dark you blossom in me!

"Beloved! I make this charge upon you:
When out of my littleness you come to the sudden vastness,
And faces are about you, and cities, and the winds of the deep:
Fear nothing, baby:
My arms are there: my breasts: your mother meets you!"

Thus sings the woman: this is the song of all women:
So sang a woman to me.

Tides of the darkness! Cave of the midnight!
Am I still seed?
What life-blood flows through the Earth to me:
What great love is upon me:
Who sings? . . . What Mother?

DEATH

THIS starry world, and I in it . . .
How can I get out of it?

I go to sleep, but when I wake I am still here . . .
All night my blood-drops circled through my body as the stars circle through the body of the world . . .
All night the flame of life burned in my breast and brain as the stars burn in the breast and brain of the world . . .

And what is Death?
It is a swing-door. I push through, coming out on the other side . . .
But the other side is the world, just as this side is the world . . .
There is no escape . . .

So I had best do my work now, lest I shall have to do it later . . .
I had best be myself now, lest later I shall have to battle with the crusts upon myself,
Lest later I shall have to begin again at the beginning, unlearning all my faults . . .

This was as true a hundred million years ago,
This will be as true a hundred million years from now,
As it is now, at this moment.

LOOKING DOWN ON EARTH

LOOKING down on Earth,
As from some distant heaven,
And seeing body after body drop and the life fly from it,
All day long and all night a host of the dead arising:
It seemed indeed a curious life, that life:
It seemed indeed a curious end, that death . . .

Then, here on Earth,
I sitting at this desk in this small room,
So thrillingly alive,
Yet soon to meet that fine decisive moment,
Pause in strange awe to think that what these others,
These hosts of dead, have passed through,
I too shall soon experience, down to the last grey detail:
Darkness, with secret gleams of a rising twilight beyond . . .

Not only these others (ah, that is strange enough!)
But I myself: all that I am,
To pass through the black process,
Turning away in agony from the sweetness of the sun and the crowds,
Renouncing all, with bitter dread and loathing:
Even as the babe in the womb, could it be conscious,
Would pass into the mystery of the world . . .

Ah, world, art then a womb?
Are we, the living, but the unborn children,
And is death birth?

THE RUNNER IN THE SKIES

WHO is the runner in the skies,
With her blowing scarf of stars,
And our Earth and sun hovering like bees about her blossoming heart?
Her feet are on the winds, where space is deep,
Her eyes are nebulous and veiled,
She hurries through the night to a far lover.

IN THE THEATER

LAST night in the theater
The fleet-footed dancers bowed in the spotlight:
Then they clasped, and invisible hands shaped them like waters
that never spilled:
And at once through me rose the mists of creation:
And I saw that chaos, the illimitable nebula of the universe
Had jetted forth this pair: the eternal pair:
Sex: the dancers: the light-footed trippers on the Earth.

THE SURVEYOR

A FANCY teases my brain:
From the North Star the Surveyor drops his plumb-line,
It unravels down to the Earth, and beyond the Earth through
the spacious gulfs beneath. . . .
He measures the heights and depths of the heavens:
Who shall measure the width?

A HANDFUL OF DUST

I STOOPED to the silent Earth and lifted a handful of her dust . . .
Was it a handful of humanity I held?
Was it the crumbled and blown beauty of a woman or a babe?
For over the hills of Earth blows the dust of the withered generations:
And not a water-drop in the sea but was once a blood-drop or a tear:
And not an atom of sap in leaf or bud but was once the love-sap in a human being:
And not a lump of soil but was once the rosy curve of lip or breast or cheek . . .

Handful of dust, you stagger me . . .
I did not dream the world was so full of the dead:
And the air I breathe so rich with the bewildering past:
Kiss of what girls is on the wind?
Whisper of what lips is in the cup of my hand?
Cry of what deaths is in the break of the wave tossed by the sea?
I am enfolded in an air of rushing wings:
I am engulfed in clouds of love-lives gone . . .

Who leans yonder? Helen of Greece?
Who walks with me? Isolde?

The trees are shaking down the blossoms from Juliet's breast:
And the bee drinks honey from the lips of David . . .

Come, girl, my comrade:
Stand close, sun-tanned one, with your bright eyes lifted:
Behold this dust . . .
This is you: this of the Earth under our feet is you:
Raised by what miracle? shaped by what magic?
Breathed into by what god?

And a hundred years hence, one like myself may come,
And stoop, and take a handful of the yielding Earth,
And never dream that in his palm
Lies she that laughed and ran and lived beside this sea
On an afternoon a hundred years before . . .

Listen to the dust in this hand:
Who is trying to speak to us?

ASSURANCE

YEA, there are as many stars under the Earth as over the Earth . . .
Plenty of room to roll around in has our planet . . .
And I, at the edge of the porch,
Hearing the crickets shrill in the star-thick armies of grass,
And beholding over the spread of Earth the spread of the heavens . . .
Drink this deep moment in my pilgrimage,
With a sense of how forever I have been alive,
With a conviction that I shall go on, ever safe, ever growing,
The stars to be included in my travels,
And the future sure before me.

THE RISEN ONES

BEGINNING millenniums back
We were given of the cup of the Earth to drink:
A cup of the blood of torment and love:
A cup set to our emerging and vanishing lips again and again
through a million years:
And we have waxed on agony: seed has become man.

But behold! now from the rivers of blood the prophets of peace
lift up,
Out of the pain rises a running and wingèd joy,
And out of the lamentation springs a laughter!

THE DREAMER IN ME

THE dreamer in me keeps on dreaming though my lips are babbling and my eyes are watchful . . .
I may be in the railroad terminal speaking to a friend.
The dreamer is on a warm moist hill under the cloud-soft skies,
He feels the Earth moving and smells the flowers down to their roots,
He pierces the blue heavens with his wings.
Then I look round and think, how strange:
Stone walls: crowds: my friend and I . . .
Yet all of us seen by the dreamer as a little blur in the skies,
As a patter in immensity . . .
Where are we? where is Earth? where are the skies?
The dreamer shivers and laughs:
It is so miraculous, visionary and grotesque,
Such nonsense, this reality . . .
Yet my friend and I go on talking as if there were nothing strange in it at all.

WE UNBORN

I

I AWAKE:
Midnight, star-shouldered, is leaning over me.

I must to my desk, and light the lamp, and stare at the flesh
of my hands and legs:
Marveling to breathe and be alive.

I open the window: I lean out in the dark.

Stars! shall you answer my cry tonight?
Earth! shall you turn to the call of your son?
Where is the answerer? Where are the lips of the midnight?
Oh, world, my belovèd, whisper to me!

Surely my love for you has been welcome in the darkness of
the night:
Surely, Mother, the asking child shall be taught:
Though I am little in the flesh, am I not large in the love of
my heart?

II

I sit at my desk:
I take the eye of Science and spy out the endless ether floating
with worlds,

But of all those stars, those numberless millions beneath and above,
Only the little hasty Earth under my feet.

Millions of the sprawling bodies of men clothe like a sea the slopes of this planet,
But from all that naked flesh lying on the globe,
Here do I rise, not one of them: but I,
Myself . . .

III

I take the wings of thought,
Up from the Earth I soar, I scale the skies quicker than light,
And the planet whirls to a moon beneath my feet,
And drops through the gulfs, a stone,
And dwindles to a star . . .
Still spreads the Milky Way ages above the reach of my fingers,
And all the sides of the amphitheatre of Eternity hold tiers on tiers of the far stars,
And the monstrous abyss is scattered with a sowing of stars,
And looping its twinkling sun, the grain of the Earth is shining . . .
But there is the body I left: sitting in the narrow room:
Writing at the desk:
It pauses: the face lifts: the eyes stare in the lamplight:
It questions . . . it questions!

I drop:
I am back in my room: I am at this desk:
Tut! skies? A picture hanging on the immense walls of my mind:
The Earth is a curious nugget in the palm of my hand:
I am the sustaining and enfolding ether of the universe!

IV

I gaze at the ash of my cigar:
I become smaller than a pin-point: I climb inside the ash:
Lo, a world immense and miraculous as the star-sown universe!
I am standing in the spinning of atom-worlds,
I am pausing in the rising and setting of innumerable suns,
I am lost in the fleeing of dead grey moons in the dark . . .

I laugh: I fleck off the ash: it scatters:
And lo I am still here, face to face with Self.

V

Ah, not that one thing is more miraculous than another,
But that somehow, struck from this mass and motion, not you nor the sun,
But I, I am here, in the center and thick of it:
This torch of a body with a brain shedding invisible light:
This Self, this secret cave I may retire to:
This paradox of outer appearance and inner perception:
This net that catches stars and people as if they were fish in the infinite sea:
This strainer wherethrough all tides of life pass, leaving deposits:
This tool working on the world: this flame burning into the beings of others:
This lover and hater casting light and shadow:
This creature: this creator:
This dwarf: this god:
This is the dumb-mouthed miracle my questions are shattered on!

VI

With all the heavens to choose from:
I that may have dropped once through the Milky Way,
Sky to sky falling,
How did I ever pick, not only the Earth,
Poor little brown ball, ever half-dark and half-wintry,
But that infinitesimal pair, that woman and man,
In the quaint hill-house at the head of the rambling street,
And take on—I that had measured the heavens—
This form that now is bowed at this desk, writing this song of questionings?

VII

The room swims out on space:
And I see that the finger of greatness touches my forehead:
And that size is nothing: experience is all.

For the kiss of my belovèd shrinks night to the rift of her lips,
And the death of my child darkens sun and moon in the firmament,
And my heart's song turns to an echo the large music of the spheres,
And my spirit's dream makes the heavens the shadow of my gliding feet.

VIII

I am as a wave fleeing before the flood of the ages:
The rush of the ocean-river pushes me on: it lifts creatively through me:
It yet shall sweep me out into the night.

Oh, Ocean, eddying with spindrift of stars and moons,
Oh, Mother-Ocean, how did you beget me?

And now the voice of the Ocean rolls into song in the channels of my heart:

IX

"I am the Mother:
I am the Ocean shaped of the waters of life:
My body is the spiraling torrents of Life across Eternity:
Out of the mouth of darkness I came pouring,
And down through night I descended, a child of waters,
A singing girl whose body grew hollow with the drifts of the suns . . .
For the nebula of my childishness was shot with dreams,
And I eddied toward the light that opens in your mind,
And I shaped toward the love that lies in your heart,
And I groped toward division into millions of gods,
The one made many . . .

"In a fury I have grown: ages but the crusts I have broken through:
Skies but the hollowness in the depths of my waters wherethrough I have sent my strength.
Suns but pods I have burst, scattering seeds of planets:
Earth but a bud of mist that opened before my yearning into hills:
And the hills, mating with my love, opened out into seeds,
And the seeds unfolded into animals,
And the vague-brained animals blossomed into man:
And still I grow: through you, I grow:
You in your little room somewhere suspended in the sky-egg of the stars:
That egg, the womb of your Mother!

"Son: my belovèd!
I am the Mother:
And though your body is hidden within me, I lift through you, you lift through me:
For I am the Ocean of life dividing into millions of channels:
You are one of the channels:
Together we innumerable waters pour through the heavens,
And there shall be many minglings until we grow into gods:
Growing forever through torment, travail and love:
Reaching toward the deaths that are births:
And you are that part of me that is creative as I:
Your will is on the reins of the stars even as mine is upon them:
Created, you have become a creator.

"Son: my belovèd!
Love death, the releaser:
Give yourself grown to the outward-opening gates:
Pass from the sun-woven littleness of the heavens
To the spaces of my arms:
Be born! be born! Many and many await you!"

X

Star-shouldered midnight! Room solid about me!
Flesh of my hand holding the pausing pen!
How here, cooped in, shall I realize the vision?

Lo, I will bag the stars, clapping the far millions of them in:
This scoop is the little womb of the Mother.

I will recede in phantasy a million years back
And stand in the sun-fire from which I sprang,
And swim the dark river of my life up the ages:
That river is the flowing blood of the Mother.

I will take a string and hold one end of it on the Earth
And one end touching the seven high Pleiades,
And I will describe a circle around the Earth:
This huge sphere of skies is but an egg in the body of the Mother.

XI

Mother:
Oh, thou reaching me through thy body with life-blood and love:
So deep within thee I bide: so thoroughly thou growest through me:
So thoroughly I grow through thee:
That though the slant of infinity finds me as a mote of flesh on the mote of a world
The heavens are but feeders of my growth and the Earth is my supper before the night of death:
The ages of thine agony and mine are the pains of my growing:
They that love me and they that hate me are thy hands shaping me:
And the streets are the running track of my soul.

Yea, these people are thyself and myself, Mother:
Through a million years we have been poured through each other:
Through gate after gate of the human Mothers I have come
Up the alley of the ages: often a mother myself . . .
Oh, generations, we have passed through each other!
Oh, houses of the flesh, we have dwelt in each other, heart within heart!
Oh, people, it is for this I am drawn to you with such unsearchable love!
This is the mass of blended life the Mother is growing through.

XII

Mother, may I not well sing the amazing song of life?
Oh, may I not well lift the song of my adoration?
This gift is too great for the heart of me so tiny and throbbing:
Bear me on thy tides and pour through me into great and unwithheld creations and love:
Let my lips in the darkness bear witness to thee:
Let my works be thy works through the toil of my hands:
Let me go forth in the day dawning, dropping the stars of thy heavens on the darkened streets:
I am thy son, and I would have thee take joy in me:
I am thy unborn, Mother, moving toward the morn of my nativity.

III

INTERLUDE

THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (continued)

AT 31.

I go to Europe:
I carry the proofs of Songs for the New Age
And read it aloud on the ocean, a woman listening.

Hamburg is quiet and orderly: Paris is theatric:
London is the heart of the world, grey with doom . . .
But the South of England is green with summer:
I hear the lark, I walk with Arthur, and the English fleet,
Gathered from the planet, shows me the greatness of England . . .

In that greatness I see a dynasty passing . . .
The song of Walt Whitman becomes the earth-song,
And the star passes from Europe to the West. . . .

I do not know how it shall be, but standing on Westminster Bridge,
Looking on that Parliament, that spider-center of the world,
Whose filaments enmesh the encircled globe,
I know that the Old World bursts like a shell
From which new-born America rises . . .

I know this . . . on the day before sailing, Liverpool runs shrill with doom,
And one day out, the world is at war.

AT 31–2.

How terrible is homecoming!
Our ship, fearing some phantom Germans, fled up to Halifax
And it is five in the morning when the sleepers pull in at Grand
Central Terminal.

New York is August-shabby . . . it seems a dirty and ugly
city . . .
Even Washington Square is dust and dirt . .
I long for the great clean ocean and the white ship,—
And the dream of beauty that is France . . .

Yet there are compensations . . .
I come into my first fame as a poet, I find myself
One in a new birth of American art,
And the life-work comes clearer to me.

But I go bury myself in Chicago, writing motion-pictures,
Merchandizing my talents, as I have to do,
And loathing America.

I write songs:
It is a time of groping: I try this, I try that:
The war has broken open the hideous secrets of life:
And now I think love of a woman is the way,
And now laughter,
And now the fashioning of a new god, . . .

And now the searching analysis of the soul,
"Save yourself, you cannot save others"—
And I gather all my writings into two volumes,
War and Laughter, and the Book of Self.

IV

THE SONG OF LIFE

I

WHEN the youth left his Mother's house
Morning was among the mountains
And Spring,
And even as the hills pressed against their breasts with arms of forest
The little blue lake before that house,
So the Mother encircled her son.

The Father came, and then went,
And the lad followed the man with a glance of hate.

His Mother gave her son a bright sword:
"Keep this, it is sharp with your Mother's love:
Use it to slay the Dragon."

"There are no Dragons in these days," said the youth.

But the Mother smiled in sorrow:
"There are, there are, my son . . .
And when the dark hour comes
Slay, though it slays you."

II

Then he said:
"How can I bear to leave you?"

She spoke with passion:
"Where you are, my son, there am I:
And where you go, I follow . . .
And when you are in fear and need, as a child again,
Turn even so much as an inch, and you will find your Mother,
Her arms warm about you."

They kissed good-bye: though he doubted her words.

But as he started forth, not daring to look back,
From the Mother sprang the image or ghost of the Mother,
Like her even to the grey hair about her temples,
And keeping pace with the youth, walked on behind him,
And followed him to the woods.

III

He walked straight down the trail, looking back but once:
He did not see the Mother so close behind him,
But he saw the beloved woman in the doorway,
And stumbled on blind with hot tears.

And he thought:
"I leave her with him:
Would first that he would turn into a dragon
That I might slay him, my hard father,
And remain forever with her."

His stumbling startled partridges:
They drummed wildly up through hemlock twilight
And flashed across a clearing of sun:
He smelt strong pine and good Earth:
He drank the wild mountain-air . . .
The blood of youth mounted and flushed his body . . .

Sudden, the most ancient intoxication was his,
Wildly beating against his longing for home,
And restlessly he plunged ahead.

"Would I stay," he thought, "would I stay?
Or would I go clamorously against the world,
A conqueror from the hills?"

The Image followed him, quickening her steps to his.

IV

The road goes down from the mountains to the smoky valleys
of men:
It goes down a great slope along a precipice:
And there beyond stretches the world.

Down the road the youth came swinging radiantly,
A hunter from the hills:
He was good health among the healthy heights,
He came toward the valley like good news.

But he paused precipitately:
For in the western skies hung a vision and a mirage:
Hung as a cloud hangs, a golden city,
With all her towers and domes and climbing roofs:
A vision like gold sunrise,
Like the dazzle when one looks into the sun . . .

His heart failed . . .
"I conquer that?" he asked . . .
"Who am I, that this task is mine?
My place is in the pine-sweet house of my Mother,
And in the simple health of the mountains
And the simple days."

V

But as he turned to go back,
That Image turned not:
And he thought he saw his Mother,
She, standing very close to him in the sunlight,
Sad, ah, so sad, with her dark experienced eyes
And the lines about her mouth.

He thrilled as he felt her arms about him,
And remained so in comfort.

But as he looked up, the golden city was gone:
And he girded up his loins,
And went on, the Mother following him.

VI

Now there dwelt a wood-cutter in the midst of the lower forest:
He dwelt alone with his daughter.

The youth was wandering through the forest, and thirsted:
It was near noon . . .
He spied the wood-cutter's cabin, and came to the door.

The house was empty, sweetened with pine-needle air,
Shafts of dusty forest sunlight, and silence . . .
Silence, save for a creek of the heights
That roared white and icy down the rocky flume . . .

The youth searched about, drawing near to the waters,
And came to some bushes, and peered through:
And he forgot his Mother and himself, adoring the glory of this world.

VII

For the wood-cutter's daughter was bathing in the stream:
A young girl, dark, with hair like the raven's,
And a slipping white body fresh from the waters and flashing
As the sun ran down the wet:
Over her head she held a towel with two arms out,
And ecstatic with the cold creek, and with glowing drunken youth,
She stood tiptoe, as if wings on her feet would toss her over the pine-tree tops . . .

And lacking wings to lift her, she sang:
Sang spontaneous snatches of a ringing wood-music:
A hymn to Earth and life.

Gone were Golden City and Mother for the lad:
He panted suddenly with the pines and the passionate Earth:
He was a boy of the sun, armed with the lance of fruitful fire:
He grew dizzy, and blushed, a flame of desire:
A flame to wrap the girl in.

VIII

When she came up, in a rude garment of green,
Through the hang of which her white legs glanced and vanished,
And her black hair about her back and shoulders,
And one hand holding the green against her young breasts,
She spied the youth, who waited trembling in her father's doorway.

She stopped, as a doe stops, hearing the hunters:
Startled, wide-eyed, with parting lips,
And one knee over the other . . .

Yet even in her fear she thought she saw a shadow upon him or behind him:
But she did not see it was his Mother.

Then he spoke, stammering, asking her pardon,
And telling of his thirst.

"Wait," she said, confused, "until I am dressed,"
And slipped by him into the cabin,
And closed the door.

IX

He heard her singing softly as she clothed herself,
And he knew that he had seen the naked Earth,
For what is body of man but Earth stripped down to its essence,
Its magical and miraculous core of vision and hands?

And she, she knew she had gazed into the face of the sun,
For what is the sun but the male of the Earth,
Whose pointed fire impregnates the seed?

But when she called him in, they dared not look at each other:
He saw the rude table set with milk, and with bread and honey,
And nuts of the wood.

He sat and ate, and she tended him . . .
And so the wood-cutter found them,
Lad and girl in the shadow of the cabin,
Graceful beyond mated tigers or mated antelopes.
Oh, cup of sparkling wine, which, if they are wise,
The elders put to their soul's lips, and drink:
Youth, that keeps age young.

X

He abode in that place a fortnight:
He helped the wood-cutter fell great oaks,
Swinging lustily the axe.

All that time his Mother hovered over him,
But her image had grown wan and white and thin,
Like a shadow against a second light.

Sometimes the girl brought them their midday meal,
But for love of each other, they dared not look at each other.

Then at night, before the roaring logs in the hearth,
They sat: she sang: he told tales out of his youth.

Once the father slept, and as they said good-night,
He dared to kiss her:
Her lips were smooth as a lily-petal,
Or smooth as a curved stem of the Indian-pipe:
And her breath was the full rich breath and sweet
Of meadow kine:
Through the kiss, and the quick touch of her back,
He felt her body as a gliding stem of wonder, so young, so sweet . . .

But on his couch he laboured and panted:
His joy ran into distress: the light darkened:
He was in a pain that amazed him:
A poison lurked in the wine,
A serpent coiled in the girl's heart.

XI

Spring was at her height:
The red cardinal was building his nest, and singing:
The stags were battling for the does.

There is in that forest a leafy covert, in shadow, with soft grass:
Violets peer among the grasses:
And the amorous wind, gone cool and hot,
Is rich with herbage, and the damp rank Earth,
And pungency of pines.

A bed this, for lovers,
In the season when Earth is a bridal bed,
And many songs rise, and a dream wings tree to tree;—
Then in agony is ecstasy, and the wild, the golden energy
Goes restless through all bodies of life:
And there is desire to create, the longing for children.

On this day, through sun and flying shadow of the forest,
The young lovers went, nearly running, and with no words,
Until they found the covert.

There they stretched their fresh young bodies on the grasses,
And panted secretly . . .

Thought was gone, and speech lost:
They were caught in the inarticulate silence of nature:
Which feels so deep it cannot speak.

XII

Insects buzzed in the grasses,
The bees hummed by with cargoes of wood-honey:
Gazing up into the sky, they saw it as an infinite fire of blue,
Changing the world to glory.

For very pain he turned toward her, raised on his elbow,
And his hand down her sloping side feasted upon her.

Then she drew near, in pain,
And the moment had come for them . . .

But as he locked her in his arms,
A black snake of horror reared hissing in his heart,
And passion died . . .

For in his arms lay his Mother,
The hair grey over her temples,
And the lines about her mouth,
And sorrow of those much-experienced eyes.

He arose, trembling, and turned from her:
He knew that he was naked.

Flaming swords drove him from that Eden,
And not once looking back, he left her where she moaned and wept,
And went forth to find the trail again,
His Mother following.

XIII

He thought to himself:
"I will go back to the house where I was born,
Where all is simple and secure:
And I will be a good son, and help my father at his hunting."

Yet he tried again to think of the wood-cutter's daughter:
But he gave this up in horror,
For whenever her image floated into his mind
It took the visage of his Mother,
And he shuddered at the passion that he felt:
Shuddered, and put it from him.

So, distraught, he found the trail,
And he thought he saw his Mother in front of him,
Beckoning him home . . .

He followed, slowly . . .

XIV

But when he came to the hill of the Vision of the Golden City,
He paused:
Pilgrims in grey were going in slow processional up the slope . . .

It was grey twilight, and out of the hidden valley beyond
The bells were beating solemnly,
And peace was on the planet. . . .
Through the grey air the grey procession wandered . . .

Then the leader, a simple religious man,
With beard, and clear untroubled eyes,
Turned to the youth and spoke to him . . .

"Son, you are troubled!"

The lad felt suddenly that he could say all:
This man was a sky of understanding . . .

"All is vanity," he said, "and the world is foul:
I am beset with life's perils."

"Then," said the leader, "turn unto God:
Put on a grey robe of forgetfulness
And turn inward from the world . . .
'*He* giveth his beloved, peace . . .'"

Night poured her stars out into the gulf of grey,
And all was still:
He took the robe, and followed.

XV

Now there was a place in the forest the Druids might have
prayed in,
August with highest pines:
Here the forest turned in on itself
And meditated in thick silence . . .
Here was sanctuary from the world,
And the woods like a mother enfolded whoso came,
And a man knew vastness by being closed vastly from it.

The pilgrims halted here, and put down their burdens,
And built a fire, and laid out a frugal supper.

In the silence the leader rose, and pointed upward:
Between the dusky treetops glinted the stars.

XVI

Against eyed Night they gazed.
"O you stars," (so he prayed)
"Who shepherds you, each in his path, across the eternal reaches?
Who holds you up from the abyss?
He shepherds us, each in his path, across the reaches of Earth;
He holds up us from the abysses beneath us . . .
O Father, that art in heaven,
With open hearts we entreat thy love
And surely thy love is for thy children,
Who are very little, and they know not where they go, but their souls thirst,
And they crave thy healing waters, O thou God."

Then, in the fire-crackling silence,
Off from the youth's soul slid the load of the world,
And through him went bliss deep and pure:
Tears faltered down his face,
He was at peace.

"I have found God," he thought,
To-night I shall sleep."

He did not see his Mother's image grown large as the night
Inlaid with stars.

XVII

They went singing in the morning:
"The pure shall conquer heaven!
Glory! glory! glory!"

"Am I pure?" the youth asked himself . . .

His young body was fresh from the bath,
Sap climbed in him: sunrise laughed:
His soul *danced* . . .

Then he remembered the girl bathing in the flume,
And her outstretched arms, and opening singing mouth.

His grey robe sat like steel on his naked shoulders,
And chains bound his ankles.

"What have I to do with these solemn ones?" he asked . . .
"Are they swimmers, and runners, and wielders of the axe?
I am cheated of my youth."

In dark revolt he walked with the pilgrims along the climbing trail:
But they went singing in the morning:
"The pure shall conquer heaven!
Glory! glory! glory!"

XVIII

But at high noon they came to an ancient temple:
Even their soft footsteps sent echoes among the marble pillars . . .
Each chamber was a step rising toward the inmost sanctuary:
And shadow deepened room to room . . .

That temple stood white on an island:
The river splashed among the reeds around it,
The lizard basked on the rocks . . .

In the outer court the white sunlight dazzled,
But in the second court the light was mellow,
And in the third it was golden-grey,
And in the fourth it was like the light of a starry night.

In the fifth they paused so that the eye might see,
And in the innermost holy of holies they saw not for a great while,
But were enfolded in the primal dark.

Then, when they saw,
They beheld a kindly image of God, the Father,
Bearded, and wise of eyes, and with hand blessing.

And the leader murmured:
"This is the Silence of Silences,
And we are in the song of this Silence:

This is the Light in Darkness:
And we are in that Light:
This is the Peace that passeth understanding:
Open, heart, be lifted, soul, give all, give all;
Arise! shine! be glorified!"

XIX

In the first court the youth felt a cool hand laid on his throbbing forehead:
In the second his body eased and discord ceased,
In the third a strange music began in his heart,
In the fourth a longing filled him for ineffable mystery:
In the fifth he panted with great thirst,
And as he listened in the inmost shrine
Earth passed away as a smoke in the heavens,
And he stood in the Mystery.

This wonder dwelt with him for seven days:
His eyes gazed inwardly, and he saw and heard not:
He was as one apart . . .

And in this time he heard buried music, the song of the soul,
As it flowed like a stream in the ocean:
And strange glimpses came of old days,
And he was a child crawling in the garden and considering butterflies,
Or at the window, in his mother's arms, he saw the full moon and said, "That is God."
Or he smelt faint honeysuckle and warm milk,
Or he dwelt a pygmy among giants, and one of these was his father.

Then, many times, he seemed deep in water,
And in many waters:

And this was the sea sounding in his ears:
This was the sea . . .

So he moved like a memory for seven days,
His Mother's image patiently tracing his steps.

XX

One night he arose out of sleep, with a shout pounding at his sealed lips:
And wildly he slipped from the camp, and ascended a high hill . . .
The trees were swinging in the wind, and the clouds were driven across the heavens . . .

And up on the hill's height he shouted:
"Alone! I am alone!
Lord! they have dragged me down in the abyss!"

And a dark shape stood up against him . . .
And he drew his sword to slay it . . .
The same sword that his Mother had given him . . .

But in agony he fell down on the damp Earth,
Crushing the grasses, and gnashed his teeth, and moaned . . .
It was the darkest hour.

Then a wind seemed to lift him, lift him lightly as a dead leaf is lifted,
And he arose like a wave,
And looked upward, and behold,
The heavens opened in gold before him.

And it seemed as if a face shone in the centre of the gold,
Even as the sun,

But around it were wider and wider rings of suns,
Even as a widening funnel from heaven to earth,
And these rings of suns circled like angels singing:
And the light was intolerable.

XXI

He sang: "O flame, O life!
O universe that is fire from end to end,
And one fire opens into another,
And I am a flame singing in the glory . . .

My revelation has come to me, and truth is upon me . . .
I shall carry God to the ends of the Earth . . .
Now I shall raise the multitudes with news of heaven."

And he went down to the sleepers,
And they awoke and saw that he was one purified,
And that he was love.

And that morning he spoke the prayer before them,
And he was the first among them to sing in the morning:
"The pure shall conquer heaven!"

XXII

He repaired to the temple to make sacrifice:
For he loved God so that he had to give to him . . .

And he had but one thing to give that was precious to him,
The sword of his Mother.

"And this will I give," he said, "though the blood of my heart
goes with it."

He came to the image in the inmost shrine,
And he loved the image . . .

He knelt and prayed to it . . .
"Father," he prayed, "thy love enfolds me,
I am a child in thine arms:
Thou art with me day and night,
And where I go, thou followest,
And when I need, thou art there . . .
O for a sign, reach down, O Lord,
Reach down and take thy child in thine arms."

And he waited for the miracle

XXIII

That shape of God did reach down;
And the youth felt great arms enfold him,
And was caught to the heart of God . . .

But in his ecstasy he opened his eyes,
And the silence sundered in a great cry:
For he saw God face to face . . .

And over the temples of God was grey hair,
And around the mouth deep lines,
And sadness was in the much-experienced eyes . . .
And God was the beloved woman . . .

He pushed away in a wild fear, keeping his sword,
And fled far from that place.

And he flung off his grey robe and ran naked:
Even as one mad . . .

And though he saw not the image of his Mother hastening
behind him,
And even as his shadow,
He cried out:
"Why do you pursue me forever?
O monster-mother!"

He had forgotten that she was to be with him ever.

XXIV

Now the summer was rich on the land,
And the fledgelings were testing their wings for flight:
The milk came thick with cream, and the flies swarmed about
the lashing tail . . .

It was a time of gardens, and sleep in hot noon,
And mad throbbing nights . . .

Now the spider killed her mate and dined on him,
Now in the jungle the hunters slew,
Now there was war among men . . .

And the youth, in the quick flush of a summer morning,
Came out upon great waters, smooth in the sun . . .

And he saw canoes heavy with bronzed warriors,
Their paddles dipped, rippled and flashed: the drip fell:
They were moving toward the shore.

And the promise of heat heated his blood,
And he said:
"I am a hunter from the hills:
I came from my mother's house to battle and conquer . . .
I am still young."

So he waited, exultant, for the coming of the fighters.

XXV

Their chief greeted him . . .

"Why does the stripling watch us, as idle as a girl?"

He said: "I would go along with you."

"Has the boy any fighting gear?" asked the chieftain.
"My warriors have no arms for you."

And the youth showed his sword, and the chieftain felt of it.

"A true sword," said the chieftain, "but a sword for a man."

"I shall grow a man, using it!" cried the youth.

The warriors smiled, but they accepted him. . .
He bore his share of a canoe on his shoulder,
And marched in the hot sun across the naked land . . .

And as his shadow his Mother marched close to him in the sun.

XXVI

Their bivouac was on a hill,
Under the far-off camp-fires of the stars.

And they sang in mighty chorus all together
A hymn before the battle:

"We fight not for ourselves, Lord God of Hosts,
But for the land that bore us: our fatherland:
Whose soil is sacred with our fathers' ghosts,
And there our dear homes stand.

"Give us the battle, Lord of Sabaoth,
And thou shalt have the last gasp of our breath:
For the land that bore us, we are nothing loath
To go down dark in death.

"A people bow them to thee, Battle-Lord,
Our wives and children send into our blows
A passion that shall make our swords thy sword
And scatter all our foes."

When the youth heard this,
A glad forgetfulness of self swept him;
He was a man among men:
He was but one of a host:
And the great Cause, the Cause of a Nation and of a People and of a Land
Caught him like fire and burned him up into the flames . . .

XXVII

They swept like avengers and like destroyers
Into the battle:
And now the latter dream of the Earth,
The dream of gods that love and build,
Passed away from the bodies of men like fumes of wine,
And left the naked white bodies as they were in the
Age of Stone.

The most terrible of animals were these men:
Their fangs were lengthened into swords,
And their claws into spears:
They were as sure a thrust of the Earth as hurricane and
waterspout:
All was destroyed before them . . .

And as they came on the foe, speech was forgotten,
And all Gods blasted:
The youth tasted the entrails of vision,
With primal thirst for the blood of a man,
And hunter's lust to kill.

Screaming they closed upon each other:
And he who was pierced, felt no wound,
And he whose leg was loosed, crawled on the other,
And the dead fell with cemented clutch on the victor,
And all rolled together in red and whirling ruin.

XXVIII

Out of this insanity he came
Shaken and old . . .

They built the camp-fires, they gathered about the flames,
And trembling silence fell.

They were very wearied of the battle:
The longing for sleep was beyond the longing for life:
They were as dead things moving about.

He fell down, asleep, as a stone falls:
And all was blank and void.

XXIX

But in the morning they got them up, and followed the flying
foe:
And again each was as an eddy of wind in a cyclone.

And they came to a village of the valley, and they sacked
it . . .
They sent up the ancient houses in flames and smoke,
And they slew old women and old men,
And drove the children before them:
And all was insane vision and red madness . . .

And the youth, with foam on his lips, went into a cottage door,
And struck down a feeble cripple with his sword.

He laughed over the writhing shape,
And marked the last agony:
A terrible joy was his.

XXX

Then an old woman advanced clamouring upon him,
And he lifted his sword against her,
But his hand dropped.

She had grey hair over the temples,
She had lines about the mouth,
There was anguish in those much-experienced eyes.

And like a guilty black shape he crept away:
And the sun was dark and cold in the summer sky:
And the land was withered and old.

He was a withered thing, and he was old:
Stealing far out to the cool forest,
And beyond the battle.

XXXI

He climbed to high places to escape himself:
He was sick in body and in mind . . .

And he stopped, and knelt, and washed his sword clean in a brook,
And looking on the spring-water reddened with a man, he cried out:
"Life is a horror and a madness:
Into what cranny can I creep, where there is nothing?
I fear death is not death: but more life."

"Healing, where is it?"

"Shall I go back to my Mother's house?
Shall I bring her this ruined image of the youth that went from her?
Shall I repay her in base coin?
Or shall I take this sword and plunge it into my breast?"

He sank down moaning:
"Mother, mother! where are you?"

And those tender arms gathered him in,
And he thought he felt her warm breath on the back of his neck.

XXXII

Now Autumn, with wild grapes in her hair,
And plaited red leaves for a bodice,
Danced down the land, laughing in the gale.

The mad dance of death began:
The going out in glory . . .

Now the air tasted of sharp wild things,
And there was a game-flavour in the lusty Earth.

It was the time of dancing, and of wine, and of red living:
The forests staggered, drunkenly, shouting wine-songs . . .

And the youth, blown out of sleep by a mighty morning,
Tasted the pine-strong air of the heights,
In a rain-rinsed brilliance of the sun among wild cloud-shadows,
And took hold on life, and went with springing steps up the heights. . . .

And he came to a slope of rock and stunted balsams,
Wild, inaccessible, a primal spot:
And living gusts of the lightning air swept down it
Into the dark loud forest beneath.

XXXIII

And as he paused, with the mad kiss of the dancing sun on his lips,
In the upper woods he saw a flashing of blue,
And from out of the trees, blowing, she came . . .

Two dogs straining on the leash, she held,
And she was being drawn along in powerful strides,
One strong foot after the other taking the hard ground obstinately . . .

A garment of filmy blue tossed about her young white body,
And her eyes were of the same blue, and were liquid with life,
But her hair, blowing, was golden, and glowed heaped in the sun . . .

Down the rocks she slipped, tugging:
The strong hounds panted . . .
Then they brought up, dancing, barking and gnashing at the youth . . .

"Down! down" she cried, in a voice like wind over water:
And she looked up, beholding the youth.

XXXIV

She smiled, glad that he was strong and young,
And one blood with the weather.

But she saw the shadow of the tragic child in his eyes . . .

"Down!" she cried again, and beat the dogs down with the thong . . .
"So! They will not hurt you" . . .

He laughed shortly:

"Let me rein them in and follow them!" he said . . .

"Not both of them," she laughed . . .
"Each, one: I love the tug as of a wind on a sail."

So he took one of the dogs, and standing very near her
Saw the health glowing in her and poured like strong sun through her eyes . . .
And his sickness was drawn to this laughing health . . .
He gloried in her . . . they gloried in each other.

So swiftly they slipped and slid and were pulled, each on the leash,
Into the lower gale-loud woods.

XXXV

Oak shouted to pine, and beech to cedar:
High seas were running above them:
Brush snapped, and wood-folk scurried: the leaves fell:
Sun spilled wildly, they danced on shadows.

And she talked with him of the wars,
And of his home in the hills, and of his youth:
And she yearned over the agony in his soul.

And she said to him:
"Who can get enough of life,
And who can drink deep enough of this wine?
All that I see, I long to possess, yes, to hug it into my body
Till it runs in my blood . . .
I would carry Earth if I were large enough."

"Is this a girl? a woman?" he thought,
"Or is this Earth, the Great Mother?"

Then she spoke of her father,
Who was a hunter as his father was a hunter:
But also a hunter after wisdom . . .
She had learnt more than stag or panther in her father's cabin . . .

And so she spoke freely, openly:
He could have listened till the end of days.

XXXVI

They came out on a mighty natural clearing above a gorge:
Oak and pine were heaven-high:
The grass glistened in the wind:
There stood the hunter's cabin . . .

Her father waited them at the doorway: he greeted the stranger:
The dogs leaped on him, barking . . .

His used hands stilled them: he pointed upward . . .

There over the gorge, poised in mid-heaven,
A lonely eagle screamed . . .

Something of the eagle was in father and daughter:
And the youth longed for such victory.

Then they went in, where the savoury venison steamed,
And the golden corn was hot . . .

And the father let him stay, because *his* father was a hunter:
And so he stayed, and hunted all that wild autumn.

XXXVII

Storm was coming: the air was brown
Swirling into opening heaven-gulfs of dirty yellow:
The dust eddied, and lamentation was on the woods . . .

In the heart brooded the packed forebodings of the wind . . .
Hot, ominous, smouldering with death . . .

And the youth, and she of the golden hair, also youth,
Stood on a great rock that jutted over the gorge,
And gazed down into the shadowy abyss . . .

Now he wanted to take her body in his arms,
And pierce that strength with his life . . .

He reached for her hand, but she drew back with a cry of anguish . . .
"There is a shadow," she cried, "and a shape between us" . . .

And he looked, and between him and her,
He saw his Mother standing with vivid eyes.

The heavens burst: the autumnal rains came lashing:
The world was drowned in tempest.

XXXVIII

They stirred not, though the drench matted their hair,
And their two bodies streamed, cold and beaten.

He cried out: "I love you,"
But the words meant nothing.

"No," she said, "it is not I you love! Not I!"

He was numb with despair.

"But you love me?" he faltered.

"Ah," she said, "the heart must love, though it love but a dream:
But only a man shall win me."

"And I," he said, "am I no man?"

She was silent: he heard the rain on her lowered head . . .
And he knew himself for what he was.

XXXIX

He felt that he must die to win her . . .
Or he felt that he must carry her off struggling in his arms
As a warrior wins a woman . . .
But even in the image of this he saw his other. . . .

Then she pointed at his sword, and she said:
"Whence came this?"

He blushed: "My Mother gave it to me when we parted."

"And what said your Mother?"

"She said there was a Dragon to slay."

"There *is* a Dragon," said the girl.

"But," he murmured, "there are no Dragons in these days."

She too smiled in sorrow:
"There are, there are," she said . . .
"And when the dark hour comes,
You must slay, though it slays yourself."

Suddenly it seemed that a knife twisted in his breast:
He tasted his own blood on his lips:
And for horror, he could have shrieked.

He had to go away from her then, and he almost ran:
He was gone in the woods.

She loved him so that her anguish equalled his . . .
But she had to let him go to the death-hour.

XL

All that night in the storm
He ran down alleys of himself
And dwelt in the early days . . .

And now for the first time he knew his love for his Mother . . .
For he seemed to be a baby again, crawling on the floor,
And playing with coloured stones, and picking daisies apart,
Drunk with the miracles of the world . . .

And he was alone, in the black night, in his cradle,
And he knew he was alone:
And he cried for his Mother . . .

And the darkness and the night enfolded him with those arms,
And his longing was eased, and his fear fled away in golden dreams . . .
But forever his father was stealing the love of his Mother,
And he hated his father.

And now that the world was blasted in pine and oak
And life was shattered by yellow-flying death,
He longed to be a child again.

Then was safety, and then comfort,
Then there were arms to shelter him and to soothe him . . .
Only then was God.

Now he wept for those comforting arms again:
He did not want to taste the loneliness of being a man.

XLI

So he was buried in vision, starving for three days and three nights:
But on the third night, he climbed a hill, where stood one lonely pine . . .
He sank beneath this, awaiting death . . .

"I would die," he moaned, "I would put away the burden . . .
O beautiful Mother, dark Death, take me to your heart!"

But as he lay prone, he became silent,
And opening his eyes, he beheld the stars . . .
And he knew the hour had come.

He arose slowly, and turned:
And there stood his Mother, as in life:
The grey hair about the temples,
The lines about the mouth,
The sorrow of those much-experienced eyes. . . .

She looked at him, beseeching:
As though she said. "I have gone to much trouble for you:
And none shall love you as I love you!"

He drew his sword slowly: his heart beating in his throat . . .

"Can it be," he said, "that a Dragon can be so beautiful?"

XLII

And he said:
"How, my darling, can I slay you,
And how can I harm the least hair of your head?"

And again he said:
"I have no comfort but you, and no dream but you."

So the first hour passed . . .

Then he raised his slack hand again, and murmured:
"I am as one in a trance: I cannot do this thing."

But he knew the time had come for him . . .

And now he drew up all the passion of his heart,
A terrible wild passion,
And willed to slay her through clenched teeth:
He willed that she must go down in death:
He willed to put her from him.

But his heart whispered:
"Hold! hold! this woman is your Mother!"

And so the second hour passed.

XLIII

Now he knew what death tastes like,
And the wrench and throes of the last hour . . .
He was torn asunder, and gasping . . .

And in vision he saw the stunted balsams and the rocks,
And the leash-held girl with her firm feet . . .

Wild battle began to rage in him, to do it or not to do it:
And he went mad, and shut his eyes, and lifted up his sword,
And would have struck, but through this madness a wilder madness came,
And what he thought an image was a woman's body,
The hand grasping away the sword, and the warm body struggling with his.

In horror, he shrieked out, but now he struggled on.

And a voice cried, "My son! spare me!"

"Down, monster-mother!" he shouted, and opened his eyes,
And stabbed her through the breast.

XLIV

Sobbing, horribly shaken, he caught her falling body,
And dared not look at it.

"What have I done?" he asked himself, "what have I done?"

But the body felt strangely light in his arms,
And, curious, he looked, and behold!
There lay, not a woman, but a child in his arms . . .

And curiously he looked closer,
And he thought he knew the dead bleeding child.

And then he saw that the child was himself
Even as he was in the earlier days.

He laid the child on the hillside, and he wept sweet tears . . .

"I have slain the child in me!" he said . . .

XLV

Open went his heart, and out of it flew eagles,
And a music of great victory went all along his body:
He arose as one unshackled, and he felt himself a giant.

And he lifted up his arms to the stars, and he cried loud:
"I have triumphed over self! The child becomes a man!"

He was light as air is light, and sweeping from the heavens
Life, which is a flame, uplifted him with wings . . .

"I was sucked away from greatness by a cancer in my side:
It is cut away, it is clean cut off, and O, the world to conquer!
Where is the Golden City where I may go and work?"

Dawn began to blow her trumpets in the East:
And like a wind of dawn he hastened down the hill-slope . . .
Alone, he was alone, no Mother-Image tracked him,
But all the life in him was free, ready to overflow.

XLVI

"O my belovèd," so she sang,
"Your death-hour was birth-hour:
You are radiant with the sun-crown of man . . .
My conqueror has come from the hills, my god has come down
from the mountains . . .

"O you in whom the wild, the golden energy, even Life,
Was sucked down into the dead depths of the Past,
You have fetched Life up out of Earth in you, and it overruns,
It overruns to the barren world . . .

"I feel your loosed love radiantly
Pouring from your heart to my heart . . .
You have lost your Mother, to find her . . .
For your Mother is Life, is Life!"

XLVII

Who shall sing of the bridal in valleys of autumn, among the vineyards and the cornfields,
Or tell of the scent of apples on the night of love?
Who shall chant of the blood-red harvest-moon above the granaries and the wine-press,
And dropping fruits and the kiss of Adam and Eve?

O white miraculous bodies that becoming one, change to a channel
For all fire of all suns, the ecstasy of Creation:
And by no love of a sterile God in the heavens,
And by no love of a memory or an idol of the Past,
But by strong love of the living God, even the Life in each other,
Become Creators, bearing the living child!

Now Man, the sower, sows the immortal seed,
Now Woman, the sown, takes up the ancient burden of the Earth . . .
The Mother-Past loosens her hands from them:
A little child shall lead them . . .

XLVIII

Do they come with bold confident steps in the crimson sunset,
And the dropping sun beyond the stubble,
And their shadows long behind them on the dust of the common road?

They are bold, for they come even hand in hand . . .
They are woman and man, great in love,
And free, for that the heart's longing is met and enfolded,
One by the other . . .

Do they smile at the heavy blood-struggle among the millions,
And they rising and falling, and doing the tasks of Earth,
Among death, and despair, and bitter travail, and the dust of facts?

They smile in a world lit by the light in their own hearts . . .
Their love flowing into each other is great and it overflows . . .
And what love touches becomes transfigured.

But now do they raise their heads and are their lips parted
In wonder and in prayer?

Yea, before them, in the dust of the common road,
And bathed in the last light of day,
The Golden City hangs, the Golden City hangs.

There rise her white towers toward the evening star and the pale moon,
There lie her thronging streets,
There the struggling millions wrestle with confused dreams,
And are born, and marvel, and die . . .

And woman and man, the human pair,
Go toward the Golden City, and they smile through tears as they go . . .
Death shall come soon enough, but not till Life is spent,
Poured out on Earth in the laughter of October fields of harvest . . .

A child beckons them; it is the timid and ungrown Future:
And Night, the Mother, the Past, urges them onward . . .

And they go to the Golden City,
They go to the Golden City . . .
It is the City of Life,
And the Life is the Life of Man.

V

INTERLUDE:

THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (Continued)

AT 33.

In the spring I come to a resolution . . .
I will no longer sell my art, and since there are no magazines
for it,
I will start a magazine of my own.

That then is the answer:
Rouse America, let the sleep be broken, let the national
consciousness
Flame into American art, a spiritual fire
Victorious over the conflagration of the world,
The fired cities and fire-doomed hosts . . .

Let the Song of Walt Whitman rise in story and paint,
In music and the word.

Let the Seven Arts lead beyond the battle
Toward the unborn democracy of Earth
That gun-thunder die into song-thunder.

So I dream:
And Waldo dreams with me, a strange youth, all glory-
wrapped in France
And still to be unwrapped and to become American.

We get the money:
We send out our call to all the artists and the creators:
Your time has come . . . you may take the stop out of your
throats, as Whitman told you,
Let us come into community that we may be great.

AT 33–4.

The Seven Arts!
As I sat in my beautiful office, they came: the poets, the writers, the artists:
I grew to know all of them.

It was a warm thing, a beautiful—that magazine . . .
Van Wyck joined us, and he and Waldo and I
Hugged the damp copies every month,
And loved it.

Not a state in the Union but bought us, and far Japan,
And China and Australia, Capetown and Paris,
Received our Word.

Rolland had written for our first number
Naming Walt Whitman our Homer, forerunner of our Golden Age,
Our Periclean America. . . .
But we caught from him a vision of youth,
Youth to save the world from embattled age,
The Young World bringing Art, and through Art, Peace. . . .

There was Young Ireland, and Young Japan, and Young India,
We caught their words into printer's ink and spread them abroad.

I staggered between power and poetry:
We were fast becoming national and international. . . .
But I longed for song, and wondered: Am I an editor?

AT 34.

Now the war-shadow falls . . .
America goes mad . . .
And our vision is broken . . . the Young World totters before the guns . . .
And what we conceived as America's birth is only the ebb-tide
Carrying the child back to the mother.

For Mother England, a race turns back,
And the young guardian of Peace,
Insane, turns toward the killing.

We cannot be silent:
We will fight the war, though the word traitor springs back at us,
And we who so loved America that we spent all in a flame of sacrifice
Will die, if it must be, breasts against the flood . . .

And now comes Randolph Bourne . . .
O Randolph, I remember you,
Misshapen hunchback, with the ear awry and the slit mouth,
But your eyes, blue and beautiful,
Your eyes, where you lived, where we saw you, straight and tall,
Spirit of our youth, star of the Young World,
Brave, lonely in the red hurricanes of hate . . .

And you wrote for us . . .
And your hate of war was a great thing which we shall not allow America to forget . . .
And you led us to our last stand and the downfall. . . .

I remember. . . .
I remember how the spies watched us, and the newspapers lied about us,
And she who had subsidized us became frightened and left us moneyless . . .
And all fell away, our Managers, Editors, all . . .
Till I was left alone, and in the moment of loneliness felt death approaching,
And called to our readers, and some of them, and Benny Huebsch, stood by,
But it was no use . . .
The day came when we sold the furniture and shut the office,
And I knew that The Seven Arts was dead,
And I cried, for I loved the dead.

AT 34.

Dark winter. . . .
I sit before the fire and imagine Europe,
And no-man's land and youth slaughtered.

And I tremble . . . what word more terrible to me than traitor?
And how can love of country be called treason?

I am hopeless, helpless:
Randolph sits by me before the coal-fire in the darkened room,
And we brood on Earth, and we feel the doom in the living world,
And we sicken in inaction.

All is gone:
My task is gone, my dreams, all doors are barred before treason:
I have nothing to do, and nothing to hope.

And now I turn against my songs . . .
I see them through the eyes of despair
As the dead-wash of a false spring-tide,
And now I may never sing again . . .

It is Job's time . . .
"Sit ye in sackcloth and ashes," saith the Lord,
"Till ye are prostrate."

A great carbuncle blotches my face, the poison reaches to my eye and toward the brain:
I lie in agony . . .
I surrender all.

And then I open a new book which has come from overseas. . . .
It is Jung . . . I see myself . . . "Ha," I see, "I am sick from being a Christ . . .
I have played a Christ of Song to America . . .
I must put Christ from me: I am not the Christ."

So, late in the afternoon, in winter, in the dim firelight,
I yearn toward Christ,
And in the despair of death I give birth to a vision:
A golden outline shines on the wall . . .
It is Christ, with arms outstretched.

It is the beginning of a long travel in which I shall know the fulness of destruction
Before I can erase that golden echo.

AT 34.

It goes on . . .
Terrific days when I am analyzing myself,
Running down through my past on the road of dreams,
Uncovering ghosts. . . .

All of that Self of me to my 31st year,
The family-self before I came into the poet,
Appears, face by face, in my dreams,
And is probed, pried loose, and floats on the edge of doom,

That summer I begin to sing again, but I am not full-voiced . . .
I am groping for a new song, spinning among new musics,
Singing my Songs Out of Solitude.

Ah, what is it? Something is between me and my new song.

It is the old Self . . .
I dream one time that all my family and I enter a train . . .
It is night: the blinds are down: the cars speed . . .
They go faster and faster, the lights glare ominously, they hurl down hill,
And now we rise up, we confront each other, we are pale with terror . . .
We are doomed . . . down shoots the train through a tunnel, shrieking,
And while we scream, drops toward the center of the earth . . .

Ah, the family-self is dead . . .
I crawl inert for weeks, I am lost in darkness,
There is neither strength nor hope.
I have been torn naked. . . .

But naked of what?
I do not know, till I begin to fight . . .
Then a dream comes . . . it ends with my beginning a new song,
And a line of music is given me:
"The unending monotony, unceasing, tireless."

It is the Sea. . . .
It is the Sea singing and rolling upon me . . .
It is the full birth of the Poet. . . .
For five days the music pours, and I arise reborn,
In my hands a vision of my own future,
A promise and a prophecy,
And the race also revealing itself there,
And the new path for man,
In a song undying, The Sea.

VI

THE SOLITARY

FOR RANDOLPH BOURNE

(*Died December* 22, 1918)

1

WE wind wreaths of holly
For Randolph Bourne,
We hang bitter-sweet for remembrance;
We make a song of wind in pines . . .

Wind in pines
Is winter's song, anthem of death,
And winter's child
Is gathered in the green hemlock arms
And sung to rest . . .

Sung to rest . . .
Waif of the storm
And world-bruised wanderer . . .
Sung to rest . . .

Sung to rest in our living hearts,
We receive him,
Winding our wreaths of holly
For Randolph Bourne.

2

Winter lasts long
And Death is our midnight sun
Rayless and red . . .

Peoples are dying, and the world
Crumbles greyly . . .

Autumn of civilization
Gorgeous with fruit
Dissolves in storm . . .

And we,
Our dead about us,
Know the great darkening of the sun
And the frozen months,
Sounding our hemlock anthem,
Hanging our bitter-sweet . . .

We walk in ruined woods
And among graves:
Earth is a burying ground . . .
Nations go down, and dreams
And myths of peoples
And the forlorn hopes
Make one burial . . .

And we
Came from the darkness, never to see
A Shakespeare's England,
A Sophocles' Athens,
But to live in the world's latter days,
In the great Age of Death,
Sons of Doomsday . . .

He also came,
And walked this crooked world,
Its image.

3

In him the world's winter,
Ruined boughs and dishevelled cornfields,

And the hunchback rocks
Grey on the hills,
Passed down our streets. . . .

Passed and is gone; and for him and the dying world
Our dirge sounds . . .

4

Yet suddenly the wind catches up with glory
Our anthem, and peals wild hope,
Blowing of scattered bugles . . .

And the wind cries: Look,
Pierce to the soul of the cripple
Where, immortal,
The spirit of youth goes on,
Which dies never, but shall be
The green and the garland of the Spring.

And the wind cries: Down
To the dissolution of the grave
The crippled body of the world must go
And die utterly,
That the seed may take April's rain
And bring Earth's blooming back.

5

Bitter-sweet, and a northwest wind
To sing his requiem,
Who was
Our Age,
And who becomes
An imperishable symbol of our ongoing,

For in himself
He rose above his body and came among us
Prophetic of the race,
The great hater
Of the dark human deformity
Which is our dying world,
The great lover
Of the spirit of youth
Which is our future's seed . . .

In forced blooming we saw
Glimpses of awaited Spring.

6

And so, lifting our eyes, we hang
Bitter-sweet for remembrance
Of Randolph Bourne.

And winter's child
Is gathered in the green hemlock arms
And sung to rest . . .

Sung to rest in our living hearts,
We receive the rejected,
Weaving a wreath of triumph
For Randolph Bourne.

The Song of

THE SEA

The Song of

THE SEA

I

MY song begins with the song of the sea,
For the song of the sea is the song eternal. . . .
The forests shout and are still: no leaf stirs:
The winds sleep. . . .
The rocks are the keeps of silence . . .
But the sea sings unendingly on the shores of the human world,
And no prow puts out but is rippled with music . . .
Restlessness and rest are in that song,
Varying measures, and snatches of tune, and thin whispers and braying trumpets,
And solo singing and chorals of multitude . . .

Restlessness and rest . . .
The toilers on the shore know that the brine is bitter and that the briny song is bitter. . . .
And the seafarer hears under the full moon the mother lullaby along the ship . . .

This song is the cradle-song and the voyage-song and the grave-song of humanity . . .
The land, born of the ocean, is eaten away by this hungry mother,
The inland pines long to go back and they remember the sea-songs of old time,

And in the ears of a man this song never ceases . . .

One song, as the planet flies, rises unendingly from its lips,
And in that song the planet-children are enfolded, and never go free of it,
And never desire to go free of it,
The unborn are astir in water,
The elfin-faint song of the mother enfolds them
And the born hear that song again on the shores,
And the deep roots, yea, the sea-bottom roots of the soul tremble with that music,
And drink the miracle drink . . .

For that song is the song that the sea of creation sings and and sings,
Rolling with breakers and foaming billows and white-caps of stars,
Restlessness and rest,
Incessant, ceaseless on the shores of night,
On the shores of life . . .

All-permeating sea-song,
Music of the fluid blood and the moving spirit, life that is never silent,
Energy rolling in rhythms, triumphant, despairing, solitary, multitudinous,
Ascending descending song, the impetuous storm-brine, the soothing moon-sheen,
The icy waters that burn, the balm of the equatorial baths,
Wails of the stricken, moans of the dying, shouts of the strugglers,
Dirge and lullaby, bells of the bridal and the burial,—
All within myself, all on the shores of my own body,
The unending song of the planet of my own flesh . . .

The Mother forever near me . . .
The great Mother singing to her child . . .

Cities have also a deep sea music that ebbs in the darkness and flows in the morning,
Unending, unsilent . . .

A solitary from the hills
Hearing that song, is aware of a cruel sea,
A sea whose singing is in antiphonies of yes and no,
Choruses that battle in hoarse conflict,
A surging of storm-music, untriumphant, discordant . . .
A song that is noise with but overtones of concord . . .

The city dweller never is amazed at the song in which he himself is a bleeding chord,
How could he be amazed, knowing the hearts of men,
The anguish, ambition, defeat?

I have heard the songs of great cities,
The dim bellowing of bare ebb-tides an hour or two after midnight,
The washing lull of the dead hours,
The tremulous footsteps of sleep-walkers,
The rumble of the tide turning and the fresh cold wind that whips the gutters from the East,
The clash and growl of the first foam of the flood,
The flood itself, roaring tumultuously and with urgent power through the streets,
The white-caps and choppy waters of high noon,
Bustle, gossip and chatter of the slow sun,

The mighty out-rolling and resistless pull of the shouting ebb-tide,
The last sweet babble, the whispers, kisses, delicious teasing of the moon-white ebb,
The silvery low-singing tunes of first sleep . . .

Day after day, night after night, this song . . .
Great, terrible and magical in London, Manhattan, and Paris . . .
Foam of brief lovers in the gardens of the Tuileries,
Foam of the waifs of London at blue-lit crossings near Piccadilly Circus,
Foam of the sleepers on benches and the dry hot grass of parks in midsummer Manhattan . . .
Foam and sparkle, and the clean blue sweep of waters, and the stormy crests of crowds, bursting billows of gnashing mobs, spumy moon-bursts of revolutionists. . . .
The election crowds on Broadway, the torchlight crowds, the concert crowds in the Mall . . .
Day after day, night after night, this song . . .

The sea, black in the winter cloud-light,
Swinging rough squares of sheeted water, laced with white foam,
And spouting spume through the wind's mouth, and slashing into blue about jutting rocks,
Hard, broken, like jostling steel, out to the sky-rim,
Heaves with a merciless menace, with a monstrous strength . . .

There is no pity in the sea,
And nothing human. . . .

Indoors we may build a fire of faggots,
And read of lovers and of saviours . . .
In human warmth we may open our hearts . . .

But the wild light of November dusk glances along the windows,
The darkening room has a smile of fire,
Our backs shadow out through the walls to the shadow-shaking skies,
Backwardly we are hurled in the fight and fury of winds and waters,
The brutal ocean unleashed vents a venomous hatred,
Now the ship is clapped together, and fisted out of the flood, and pulled by talons under,
And the sea's song is a bellowing and uproar out of iced hell . . .

Softly the human voice goes on intoning the tale of gentle lovers,
The sad sweet saviour story . . .
"All is love," the voice sings, "God is love" . . .
Dimly in the smile of the fire we strive to create a circle and spot of love . . .
But we are shadows in the light, and our life is swirling out over the rocking sea,
The house-walls fall apart, we stride clouds,
We ride the tempest like witches . . .

And the human being whose soft voice remembers love for us,
We know is a demon with a strange mask.

Was it not yesterday that the sea was as gentle as a girl
Who after the restlessness of longing

Is with her lover again, in a secret place,
And he is caressing her?

Was it so long ago when the sea was as plaintive as a wounded child moaning for its mother,
Forsaken on the shore, hidden from the face of the moon?

Or so long ago when the sea, striding like heroic youth in the morning sunshine,
Shouted courage to the toilers on the shore,
And his laughter echoed among the rocks?

Or when the sea like a god, some ancient and understanding mother,
Laid soothing and healing hands of song on the hearts of men?

Sea of battles, sea of matings, sea mournful over the graves of the unremembered,
Rhapsodic on summer mornings with the flush of youth,
Sultry with passions, fogged with gropings, starry with unmeasured majesty,
Serene, furious, meditative, cold and hot, bitter and sweet,
Guised in all ages, the helpless child, the youth, the mature, the mother and father,
Brutal and delicate, divine, demonic,
What are you, sea? what are you, like something in my own depths?
Like something of humanity, yet not human?

I see the great race surging,
I see the great race rolling,
I hear the war-guns thunder and the clear-voiced choirs singing . . .

I step in a house where a tired mother croons to her sleepy child,
I walk along the shore, in the gleaming summer night, and hear the babble of lovers. . . .

The murderer walks side by side with the saint,
The reactionist and the revolutionist hate one another,
The judge is judged by the convict, the sick are healing the doctors,
The waves break one through another, the waves appear only as tools and slaves of the resistless tides,
The tides interlink, the undertow pulls against the flood,
The sea storms, is calm, is diluted with rain and resalted out of its depths,
Mercy, anguish, tribulation, and sleep . . . the weather changes . . .
We help the delivery of the new-born, and shovel earth on the dead . . .

Mare æternis!
Out of the bowels of chaos, you sea of life,
Seething, divine, merciful and fiendish humanity,
Flood of ages, flood forever old, forever new,
Laced with the foam of thinking, with white-caps of idealism,
Silvered with moonlight dream, golden with the broken-up sun, each sun-splinter a hero and a saviour,
Changeless through incessant changing,
A sea with every wave striving to leap clear of the deeps and be a soul,
With every wave longing to walk self-contained on the hard bright shore,

Rolling yearningly toward the shore, and helplessly dragged back,
Sea in which each wave is only water swinging with the ebb and flow of the flood,
Sea that dreams of transcending itself because the sun sucks it up into shining vapor-drops,
But the rain falls, the sea drinks back the rain, and after the storm the sea is the same as before . . .

Mare æternis!
Circle of life turning viciously in on itself,
Serpent with its tail in its mouth, revolving like a wheel,
Dreams of millennium when the charmed circle is broken,
When the tail is torn from the mouth,
Dreams of education, of justice, of democracy, of religion
When at last there is freedom from the wash and backwash, the tide and undertow,
The mad multitude-passions, the helpless riding of storms, the helter-skelter of weather, the groping in the fog,
When at last the sea rises above itself
Out of demonic depths to clean divine peaks . . .

The storm of revolution rides the sea,
Crying "We bring freedom, we bring peace" . . .
And revolution, like reaction, brings a new slavery, a new war . . .
For how shall the sea change its nature and how shall the sea be anything but the sea?

Beautiful over Russia shines the star of revolution . . .
And beautiful in the manger of the Soviets again the Christ-child is born on Earth,
A divine song is in the air . . .
And irresistibly, as of old, the Christ shall be crucified by his own people . . .

For the sea has not changed because a golden light falls
through the storm on the bitter waters . . .
The sea of the people is the same sea that the tyrants rode,
"Whoever is not for us, is against us," sang the tyrants,
And the people sing: "Because our cause is holy and a lib-
eration,
Whoever is not for us, is against us."

It is ever in the name of holiness and through divine sanc-
tion that man crucifies man,
The holier the cause, the more horrible the sacrifice . . .
For so long as man is of the sea, like the sea he must sing
all songs,
God-songs and devil-songs, music of mercy, music of bru-
tality . . .
So long as man is of the sea, all weathers shall sway him,
And out of the divine shall leap the demonic . . .

A friend comes to the solitary and says to him:
"But surely out of pity you are for the people,
Surely you are with the oppressed, the despised and the hun-
gry . . .
Surely you cannot stand by and see children suffer" . . .

And the solitary answers: What shall I do?

"You shall become one of us," says the friend,
"For whoever is not for us, is against us" . . .

And the solitary ponders and answers:
"But if I become one of you, I become one of the oppres-
sors . . .

For what you believe in is of God, and what your enemies
believe in is of the devil . . .
Oppression begins when God hurls Satan out of heaven" . . .

"Yet," says the friend, "are we not more right than our
enemies?"

And the solitary answers: "What is newest is most right . . .
For the new desires things of glory, even as the old, when it
was new, desired things of glory . . .
But answer me: wherein do you and your fellows differ from
those of old?"

"Our aims, our ideals, our purposes are different," says the
friend . . .

And the solitary answers:
"The sea of man is littered all over with the spindrift of
ideals . . .
Great dreams and ideas go washing over the waves . . .
Wreckages of divine civilizations mock the great flood . . .
But so long as man is of the sea, so long will the sea use
him in its eternal way . . .
Man's world is what man is, not what he dreams" . . .

"But this is hopelessness," says the friend.

And the solitary answers:
"This is but life . . .
And when men seek to transcend themselves, they shall break
the wheel,
They shall come out of the sea . . .
Only when a man becomes human does he cease to be a herd,
an energy, a sea, a thing of nature,
And is healed of the mighty opposites . . .

It is because of the sea in himself from which he has never emerged,
It is because of nature in himself, the flux, the tides, storms, visions and furies,
That he remains a primitive masked in a dream of divinity . . .

"Let him start a revolution in his own soul, and free the slaves in his own spirit,
And conquer the tyrants in his own breast,
And harness the beast in his blood,
And put away the temptation to be a supreme god,
And the equal temptation to be a powerful demon . . .
Then perhaps he shall step up on the shore of a new world,
And find what all are seeking . . .

"It is weakness to seek freedom for self by slaughtering others . . .
Equality, liberty, brotherhood are of the soul, and are of the self . . .
The easy way is out and over, the hard way is in and through . . .
It is man's soul that needs a millennium and not man's world . . ."

So the solitary spoke, and of course his words were a riddle, they were not understood . . .
And these two could be friends no longer . . .

II

I sing the battle of the soul:

At moon-wane, in furious foam-flecked seas, eddies and spouts
and spirals,
The dreaming soul, a wave of flesh, whipped, wandering,
tossing on hilly waters,
Becomes aware of itself . . .

The bellbuoys clang longings for freedom,
And the sea like innumerable bells takes up the song, and goes
pealing with it,
And the waking soul rolls like a bell clanging for libera-
tion . . .

"I am a child," sings the soul,
"I am a child and a slave . . ."
"I am a child of two mothers . . ."

For the soul finds now a sea within the sea,
It finds the surface sea of the waves of flesh clashing and
shouting around it,
It finds the under sea profound, the depths, deep and sound-
less . . .
Outer sea and inner sea,
And only a wall of flesh like a strip of sand between the
waters . . .
Only a wall of flesh between the two engulfing mothers . . .

And the soul, whipped, wandering, tossing on hilly waters,
Water itself gliding through water,
Sport of the monstrous currents, the divine-demonic tides,
Takes soundings in the depths and learns its law. . . .

The song of the outer sea is a loud song,
But the song of the inner sea is a still small song . . .
And the inner sea sings: "All seas conquer their slaves,
But to the conqueror of seas all seas bring gifts . . .
Shoreward, O soul, shoreward, be free . . ."

Now there is a wrestler in the sea:
He wrestles with the deep sea and the sea of waves:
He sinks: he rises: he puts out strokes toward the shore: he is sucked back:
Giddily he whirls, spitting the brine from his mouth, and laughs wildly, and is water slapping to and fro . . .

And there comes upon him languor, and hate of the clashing waves, and disgust of motion, and weariness of effort,
He is tired of small-sized devils and gods,
Fatigued with crowds . . .
And into his ears now the deep still sea intones a siren song . . .

"In," it sings, "under . . . come down, my child . . .
Out of restlessness, rest,
Out of pain, peace . . .
There are memories with gentle ghosts, beloved shapes forgotten, in the depths;
Mother is there when the child comes home,
She shall croon to you: she shall take you to her bosom . . .
And deeper than memory is Eden,
And Mother Eve and your Father God walking on the grass when the lilacs blossom . . .
And beneath God, the float of eternal peace . . ."

The soul listens, and sinks . . .
Sinks into the arms of the Mother . . .
Sinks through a layer of terror, through the terrible creeds and prohibiting bans of life . . .
Breaks the law of being, which is struggle,
And finds peace and enfolding death. . . .

And the soul must now choose: life or death,
Reality or Nirvana . . .
I sing not of those who, in living death, are sealed in themselves,
But I sing the battle of the soul,
Which dashes away from its lips the much-loved cup of dream,
And with birth-throes breaks open the Mother and flounders out on the swirling floods,
And, strong with the depths, strikes shoreward again . . .

Many Satans entangle this swimmer and wrestler . . .
And a sunset song and a sunrise song ring in his ears and allure him . . .
"Power, Power, Power," the sunrise song repeats,
"Love, Love, Love," comes singing from the sunset . . .

Out of the sunrise, mirage of conquerors . . .
"Be the highest wave," is the shout . . .
"For about the highest wave the cry of fame goes circling,
And the highest wave that rises over the shoulders of the lesser waves,
That goes up by trampling down,
Shall be as a rider of the sea, stern with the joy of mastery . . .
Get above the sea, by climbing over it," is the song of the visionary conquerors . . .

Old song and terrible . . .

The soul essays the task, and his height is only a slippery
pushing of the lesser waves about him,
And his is the serfdom and the slavery of height . . .
Who can stay high, who refuses to obey the low?

But out of the sunset the song of love comes alluring,
Over the crimson and melting tide the beautiful waves come
trooping,
White hands, white hands are stretched to the wanderer,
Faces glide out of shadow and back,
Golden breasts are soft in sunset,
Youth sings to youth . . .

There is a song of little children in the song of love,
There is a song of fireside and the nest sheltered from the
blast,
A song of mother and father and home . . .
"Why do you wander," it sings, "and why do you strive for
the unattainable?
What use is there in icy, lonely freedom?
What comfort on the peak?
Power is bitterness: solitude is madness:
Give yourself to the common ways, the homely ways, the
folk ways:
Come into this cove of the ocean sheltered from time and
tumult . . .
Forget the depths and the heights—but while there is yet
life, live,
Live on from day to day, with many soft arms around
you . . ."

This song is the most subtle temptation of the soul,
This sunset song . . .
But I sing the battle of the soul

Which wrestles with the weakness of love, which is self-love,
And the meshes of melting pity, which is self-pity . . .

Now the soul comes to a knowledge of itself,
And finds, in horror, that all the evils of the world,
Yes, all the evils of the two seas,
Are of itself, tangled with itself,
That the public evil of the outer sea
And the cosmic evil of the inner sea
Are woven like threads into itself . . .
So it ceases now to wrestle with other souls,
And begins to wrestle with its own soul . . .
In itself to push out the slave and the tyrant, the beast and the saint, the devil and god . . .

Yea, it goes up even against its beautiful gods,
Its adored Jesus, pure-browed Mary, and revered Jehovah,
And trembling with superstitious fear, breaks their images . . .

And the soul cries: "I have been water in water,
What I thought was self was my mingling in others,
Imitation of Christ, imitation of heroes, imitation of this teacher, that;
But now I will put all out of me though I am stripped and husked like an ear of corn
And find in the end, mildew and withered kernels . . .
I shall win myself though myself is the thinnest of shadows,
The tiniest of seeds . . .
I will become lonely, in order to be born . . ."

Bitter are the waters of November,
Bleak is the cold snow-pitted air that whirls over the barren sea,
And the gray clouds that massively fold black shadows, while the sea's song is a dirge, a threnody,

And there is no life on the deep, but the mechanical sloping
of breakers . . .
Barren, endless, and bitter the sea rides,
A few gulls wheel, the air is a flight of shadows . . .

O loneliness, who has sung your song, who has known your
dark music?
Only the stripped soul knows you, only the naked self has
tasted your salt . . .

As by a miracle the soul, wrestling only with itself, draws to
the shore,
And that grey day breaks when it stands shivering and
naked on the sand,
And looking about, sees that it is alone,
And that the sea is warmer than the winter air,
And that comfort is only in the sea . . .

Like a child, the soul weeps . . .
"I am separated from all things," it whimpers,
"I am sundered from all fires, and aloof from comfort . . .
I am naked, and have become little . . .
O the unbearableness of littleness,
O the pain of being only human and little . . ."

And now comes the temptation of the return . . .
But I sing the battle of the soul
Which, lonely as in death, straightens up in all nakedness,
Takes the North wind and the terrible view of emptiness,
And the dying of all old ways of comfort and mightiness,
And the being cut off from the face of Man and the face of
God . . .

I sing of the soul that has won self out of the clutch of the
seas,

Self, but a bitter little fruit to win,
But conquered and kept . . .

The day dies, the night is still . . .
In a few dark hours a long season passes,
And in the darkness before dawn on the land the song of meadowlarks is heard,
And the smell of lilacs comes down to mix with the sea-smell . . .

A new song is on the sea,
A softer and clearer song, a music of the south and the homing bluebirds,
And in the heart, a new song . . .

"Spring has come . . .
What grass blades pierce the loam of the spirit?
What leaves open their crumpled baby hands?
And where is loneliness now with sea and earth and the shining cities of men
Singing about me?
And where is bitterness now and barrenness, with the golden light
Shallowing along the uneven sea and dropping from the blue heavens?
And what is this in my being that bubbles upward unhindered and free,
Is it understanding? Has love come?"

Now the soul chants the chant of freedom
And the miracle of separation . . .
Now it glories in being human, and is glad of littleness . . .
Now the soul resists the depths no longer, and wrestles no longer with gods and demons,
For, behold, it is at one with the depths . . .

Soul and sea sing the song of reconciliation . . .
For he who is engulfed in the sea is a slave of the sea,
But to the conqueror of the sea, the sea brings gifts . . .
Yea, the monster sea now becomes the comrade of the soul,
And sea and soul move as married . . .

The soul sings: "Because I am myself and not the sea, nor in it,
Now I can work with the sea . . .
The sea has mighty currents and tides of destiny,
And I, born of the sea, must give myself to my doom,
Accept the destiny the depths allot me,
The destiny I make my own through my own need, my own willingness . . .
And working with the sea, I shall work out my life . . ."

Dreams, phantasies, imaginings . . .
Bubbling of the depths, the risen visionary billows of the sea of the spirit,
In the night breaking on the shores of consciousness
And the soul resisting like sand and rock, and so writing crooked lines of dream,
Yea, the soul and the sea between them writing crooked lines of dream . . .

On the shore at the break of day the soul walks
And examines the crooked lines, and deciphers this writing,
And learns its law . . . the law of the marriage or sea and soul . . .
And obeying this law, is free . . .

Not inland the soul goes, not seaward . . .
But along its jagged shore—its own fate, given by self and the sea . . .

There is a mystery here, inexpressible:
And however the books describe it,
Only he who has won himself may understand . . .
Only the lover knows love, only the sorrower sorrow,
Only the free soul freedom. . . .

I sing the battle of the soul
Which even when free longs back at times for bondage,
And often is lured by the white hands under
And swallowed again in the sea,
And again he battles, and again he must win his freedom . . .

III

Mare æternis!
In the night, flashes of lightning illumining your moving acres,
Sky-thunder answering sea-thunder,
Sky and sea wrestling in a broken blackness . . .
The whistling of the wind in the teeth of the night . . .
Slash of the rain and the crackling of the broom and grass
on the sand-dunes . . .

All life seeks cover: the bird to his nest, the nestling to the
brooding wing,
And inland beasts to their lairs . . .

Mare æternis! Intolerable power,
Trampling destructiveness,
Shattering energy . . .
Between such forces who can stand and walk?
Who can survive between such a sea and such a sky?

Yet I see a lantern on the shore,
I see staggering yellow light on oilskin, the double motion of
legs,
Flap of a coat about a button, a halo of slanting rain around
the swinging lantern . . .

It is the solitary walking by the sea,
It is the solitary stooping now and then to study the crooked
tide-lines, the débris and driftage when a billow pulls
back,

It is the solitary battling against the risen outstretched combers and their devouring mouths,
Battling against the loosed skies and the lightning, wading his way through a double thunder . . .

Seaward the lightning reveals a swirling quadrangle of the deep,
And the solitary looking, feels his heart tighten and become a knot. . . .
Are those human heads and slippery naked human bodies struggling among the white-caps?
Is the sea-water blood, reddening round them? Is it their own blood reddens the sea?
Look, with sharp blades they are stabbing and hacking at each other . . .
The sheeted lightning fails, burying the mêlée in blackness . . .

"Humanity! humanity!" cries the solitary . . .
"O you, my flesh, flesh of the adoration and the dream of brotherhood and of love,
Flesh of the infinite clear and quiet reason,
Flesh of the music of the isles of Greece,
Flesh of the coming of the Christ,
Flesh dedicated to divine vision,
Are you madness and murder and ravening bestiality?
What is in the heart of man, what is in his soul?
What sky-terror? what sea-horror?
What snake's venom does a man spit? and what dragon's fire?
You sons of God, is your mother the earthquake and the avalanche?

"Mare æternis! I know now what song your storm is singing;

What hymn of hate yells in the gale and the roaring swale
and the thundering sky . . .
I know now your love of the suffering and anguish of others,
Your tiger-love of enemies,
You who knew how to invent racks and cannons and vapors
of dense poison and spirts of body-smothering flame . . ."

And as the solitary cried out, a mob in a breaker broke
about him,
And with loud shouts they ringed him toward the sea . . .
He did not fight them: he fought a beast that suddenly reared
out of his own depths,
And the billow fell away . . .

But one shouted from the sea-fringe . . .
"Who are you, traitor, who stand aside from the battle?"

"What have I to do with the battle?" asked the solitary . . .

"If you are not with us," cried the other, "you are with the
enemy!"

"Neither with the enemy, nor with you," the solitary an-
swered . . .

"Are you not a human being?" the other cried. "And are
you not of our nation?
And is not the voice of the people the voice of God?"

"Yes," answered the solitary, "the voice of the people is the
voice of God,
And it is also the voice of the Devil . . ."

The night dragged away the questioner: but the solitary was
troubled . . .

He stooped and read the crooked writing in the sand . . .

And he read: "Obey the law of your being . . .
Obey the law of sea and self in your own soul . . .
Accept your destiny . . .
Neither resist them nor obey them: they know not what they do . . .
Evade, and go on" . . .

Under the cover of the storm, the solitary, muffling his lantern, picked his way . . .
And he mused:

"When shall the voice of the people be *voices,* and these voices, neither God nor devil, but human?
When shall the cause cease to be a sacred cause, and one's friends cease to be saints and one's enemies Satans?
When shall humanity cease to be a sea, an energy of nature, a clash of opposites, and become human?
When shall a man cease to walk in the steps of his gods and half-gods
And walk in his own steps?
When shall men cease from violence against others and turn the battle against the evil in themselves?
Do they not know that the evil they bayonet is an evil within them?
And when shall they cease from demanding that the free return to their bondage?"

"Yea," mused the solitary,
"The deep sea and I are in league.
How then can I obey the surface sea of humanity which is but the froth, toy and slave of the deep sea?
Whom have I harmed? whom have I opposed?

Why are they jealous of me? why do they destroy the strong and those who refuse to be bound with their bondage?
What do they fear at the hands of free men? Are they not shouting for freedom all the time?
They cry: 'We must be free'; but if anyone becomes free, they put him in chains and thrust him in jail . . .
Not freedom they seek: but power . . .
The sea wants power and sensual sultry nights,
And noise, and motion, and bondage, and abandon . . .
The sea loves the taste of many things
But loves nothing so much as the taste of human blood" . . .

The solitary went plunging through the night,
And the great storm reeled about him,
By lightning-illumination he saw terrible sights,
Visions of the deep that wrung his heart and blinded him with angry tears . . .
He saw a crumbling acre of skinny wretches, a toss of beseeching hands, and heard the animal cry of hunger,
Starving children floated dying on the sliding foam,
Wailing mothers crouched over babies and the waves washed them apart,
The cruel lightning slashed down among them, the tide boiled with blood . . .
And darkness carried their sorrow afar . . .

And he saw an acre of wild gayety, a dance of Dionysian fury in the sea,
Eerie phosphorescence over the combers' crests, and the naked passion of men and women,
And a laughter more horrible than the wail of hunger in that sea of blood . . .

And he saw at one place two lovers quarrelling,

And each was trying to win back the soul he had lost in the other,
For their love was a living each of the other's life,
And now each hated the other because he had lost his own freedom,
And since each soul was in the other each stab they gave stabbed only themselves . . .
Their hate was perfect, for their love was great . . .
And in that scene the solitary seemed to see the whole struggle of humanity . . .

And he saw many other sights, and some of surpassing beauty,
Sudden glimpses so tenderly beautiful that pity softened him . . .
The friend who took his friend's place in guilt and died for him . . .
The worn mother smiling with devout joy over the triumph of her son,
The unspoiled magic of first love, a boy and a girl shy and reverent before each other . . .
The lonely scientist giving up all things to cure a malign disease . . .
Joyous singers, innocent children, teachers patient with the young . . .
Much of wonder, pity and sweetness . . . moon-glimpses in a thunderstorm . . .

And the solitary thought: "Surely I cannot walk apart from all this . . .
Surely I am flesh of this flesh . . .
How can I go on in loneliness on the shore when the deep is a cry and a question and a beseeching of hands?
My folk is caught in the sea-nets, struggling, blind and in darkness . . .

Their terror and ecstasy are here—not on some distant planet—
And I am here . . . What can I do? what is my portion of the guilt and glory?"

He held his lantern to the crooked tide-lines,
And he read:
"The fruit ripens, and when it is ripened it falls,
And the animals eat of it . . .
Green fruit is no gift to hungry mouths—but only the ripened and mellow fruit . . ."

Walking on, he pondered the riddle . . .
"Can it mean," he mused, "that when I am ripe, I too shall be a gift?
It is true I have nothing to give to mankind but myself . . .
Myself through my works . . .
Must I let my works ripen in me, and when they are ripe, let them drop?
I live through the gifts of the sea—I should die this instant if humanity withheld its service, its dreams, its comradeship . . .
Then I must give back all of myself . . . give back love and understanding and comradeship and the day's work,
Yea, and the life-work . . .

"And I understand," he cried at last . . .
"To ripen, I must grow by my own law,
Even as an apple grows by its own law . . .
Hence, I go against others only when they demand that I follow *their* law;
I must resist such violence, and hold to my way . . .
Only thus may I become a gift to the folk . . .

But if I join with this group and that, if I enter their set wars, and their sea of passions,
Then growth is warped by that which is beyond the human,
Then again I am only water in water, a helpless wave of the sea . . .

The free soul must give himself
But himself can only emerge and be born when he comes out of other selves,
When he obeys, not others, but himself . . ."

IV

Wonderful as a bird in the float of the sunrise in the mountains
Is the sharp littleness, the sun-drinking solitude of the redeemed soul . . .

Where there are rocks, and a shoulder of grassy Earth,
The solitary stands in the mountain morning,
Wind-kissed, facing the dawn . . .

Here the sea-song is a forest-song
And here what flowed is solid . . .

The solitary sings the song of deliverance . . .

I drink the sun, who drank only bitter waters . . .
I see hill, sky and grass, clear and chiselled out real by the strokes of the sun-rays . . .
And I that tossed in floundering seas
Have earth and rock underfoot . . .
Everything is solid as a stone
And my soul is solid as a stone . . .

Littleness is a strong house to live in . . .
It is a stone . . .
A stone that no waters may wear away . . .

From the mountains the seas have departed
For seas are at home only in abysses . . .

Out of the seas of the Earth the mountains rise up
Shouting the song of freedom . . .

I that was a sailor and a swimmer have become a mountaineer.

Gulf of heaven, blue pocket of the abyss,
Enveloping sun-arched sky whose impalpable dome melts in the twilight,
By dusk melted like a dusty blue cobweb,
And when the cobweb vanishes, a symbol of Eternity appears,
A star, and then a bridge of stars suspended between the piers of the universe,
And upward into the abyss man looks,
Standing on two legs against the turning lump of Earth
With upraised face against the wheeling of the worlds in unsheltered night . . .
I, a man, stand as self-contained and solid in my littleness,
As you in your vastness . . .

I am human,
You are Cosmos,
I would not change places with you: I would not be elsewhere: I dream of no past or future:
I accept the present moment, the present place and what I am . . .

Standing on a hurried lump in the abyss,
I claim myself . . .

This is the sea-fruit the ocean seeks ever to deliver from its womb . . .
This is the child the mother yearned to bear . . .
For wherefore the stormy passion of the whipped deep?
Wherefore the freedom-hunger in humanity?

What is the urge toward redemption? what is this terrible age-long cry for a saviour?
Why does the sea deliver the hills out of itself?
Why do they stand up, these rocks?
What is the meaning of the dry land and the peaks?

As the hills from the sea; so man from the sea . . .

The sea rises up into rain, and the rain falls down again . . .
But if the rain fall into the sea
It is only water falling on water . . .
But the hills laugh as they take the rain in their faces,
And out of the hills come blossoms, grasses, flowers and fruit,
And nibbling wet mouths are glad of fresh Earth . . .

The mountains are great
Because the sea does not come to them like a devouring monster
But comes to them only in the mercy of rain;
This is a gift of the sea to all that is delivered out of the sea . . .
And so when the soul is delivered
The great sea sends spring rain over the soul . . .

What was sea-water to the soul when it too was a wave of the sea?

But now it is of the mountains and when the sea comes to it on the wings of the clouds and dissolves upon it in rain
Like moist soil it drinks this mercy and feels the roots beginning to stir,
And the grass blades piercing, and the blossoms beginning to open . . .
Now it knows the joy and copious loving motherhood of the sea

Which gives its free children the rain of plenty. . .

And the soul in the distance beholds the blue sea among its capes,
And in the forest and in the grass and echoing far over the morning air
It hears the song eternal, the song of the sea . . .

My song ends with the song of the sea . . .
The song the sea sings untiringly on the shores of the world . . .

One song, as the planet flies, rises unendingly from its lips,
And in that song the planet children are enfolded, and never go free of it,
And never desire to go free of it . . .
For the soul hearing this song, trembles with music to its roots
And drinks the miracle drink. . . .

It is the song of the Mother forever near,
It is the song of the great Mother singing to her child . . .
"O song," sings the soul, "which first I heard in the neighboring heart-beats and blood pulses of my mother,
Song that shaped in my own brain which was a bay of the silver-clashing sea of the past,
Immemorial music that slips through the mother in the body of the child at the hour of birth,
And he carries it into the world, and he hears it in the world,
In the bodies of men and women, in the motions of nature,
In nations, and sky, and Earth, and ocean . . .

Eternal song, eternal voice of the Mother . . .

Malformed Mother, become beautiful and straight when the child finds freedom . . .
Mother who loves the free . . .
Mother who scourges slaves but walks like a comrade with the emancipated . . .
Your song, Mother, sounds in my ears forever . . .
And by your song and the song of my soul married like treble and bass, one strain, I live and I labor,
And out of your timeless wisdom I find my light,
And out of your power, my flame . . ."

Cradle-song—voyage-song—grave-song of humanity . . .
Song whose refrain is a promise, a new vision, a new symbol . . .
Symbol of the complete human being
Whose coming in us all is the hope of the universe . . .

SONGS OUT OF SOLITUDE

THE SHIP OF SKIES

THE ship of skies
Foundered in the west
And its blazing prow
Sank off some thundering shore beyond the silence
And dark green of the world.

Or like ten rivers
The thin-spread clouds ran
Converging with vermilion and purple waters
On the western ledge
And pouring in flame over the world's edge . . .

In those bright regions
Sails were blown beyond our trouble
And some great action
Moved like song . . .

But here on tired Earth
The heavy mist filled the green runnels of valleys;
The weary air
Grew dark around the thrush's aching throat;
The house
Gloomed itself silent and black . . .
The day
Drowsed off to sleep.

MIST

I

1

IN mist Monday
Looms,
A world groping its way on a soundless,
Sightless sea:
Breaking the mist like a ship
Stopped by bells . . .

No ripples:
No rain-patter:
No hum of engines:
A dead ship
On the dead sea . . .

But on deck voices
Clear, querulous, human.

2

In the becalmed air of these hills
A strayed flicker pipes,
A frog grunts,
Footsteps sound on gravel:
But the mountain-garden
Lies at the bottom of a motionless ocean,
And Earth is an underworld.

The forest has given itself to the arms of whiteness,
And the hills wander like sheep.

3

In mist Monday
Looms,
A giant ship stopped on a soundless,
Sightless sea.

II

In mist the soul
Plaintively whispers . . .

"There are tears too many," it whispers,
"And fears too many;
I am weary of the ever-striving,
I am tired of tears . . .
I am weary of the groping and the stumbling
On the grey graves of the years . . .

"There is memory of girls like moths in the twilight
On the old city ways,
Memory of the grey twilight of the old days:
Memory of the hands of children clutching, clutching,
Beloved faces, dead, appear . . .
Beloved arms are round my drooping head
And her song is in my ear."

III

In mist the world
Forsakenly sings . . .

"Oh, for the old dead days of peace," it sings,
"The old sweet ways of peace . . .

There were cities that ran with the sunrise of wild youth,
Our children were alive,
All over again the Golden Fleece was to win
And honey to gain for the hive . . .

"All over again there was love's wild sweetness to win,
And the tale of the home retold,
The golden breakers lured to a launching of ships
In the years of old . . .
The aged of Earth could vanish away like the night
Before the sun of the young,
The human song that has risen with every spring
Was now to be resung . . .

"But the youth of the world lies dead,
The young blood is spilled,
We shall live for a long winter
Among the graves of the killed . . .
We shall live for a long winter
Remembering ways of peace,
Recalling the days of peace;
We shall grow old in the knowledge
We were better dead with these."

IV

In mist Monday
Looms,
A world groping its way on a soundless,
Sightless sea:
Breaking the mist like a ship
Stopped by bells . . .

SILENCE

AND now
I know how quiet a thing
And calm
Is freedom . . .
It cannot raise its voice nor break
The rhythm of its breathing . . .

It is,—
Needing no song,
No trumpets . . .
It does not cry nor laugh
But is silent . . .

To give it voice
Silence should have to turn to song.
But what is song?
. . . . Silence broken.

RAIN-SONG

I HEAR the window,
It is splashed, lashed:
I hear the forest,
There is rain in the gesticulating branches:
I hear the thrush,
There is rain in his tawny throat;
I hear my mother in the kitchen singing as she peels peaches:
There is rain in her dark heart.

SUMMER NIGHT

DOWN South's singing: "Darkies,
Roll dem cotton bales . . ."
"Tennessee's ketching de Memphis blues . . ."
. . . And a moon on the Mississippi
Is as sheer love-mad
As a moon on Lake Michigan . . .
Lincoln Park is silver-washed with lake ripples:
Every dark spot is a nest for two cool aching bodies . . .
(I remember you, Chicago girl,
And the blue electric light on your blue eyes,
Kisses with the taste of soft coal smoke in them,
Gossip with railroad yards in the rear.)

Telephone bells, those rasping telephone bells,
Why are they ringing in the moonlight
When folks should be loving and singing?

There are too many people in New York City:
There are miles of roofs all cluttered with legs and arms and faces:
There are chimney stacks all black in the moon like silver tarnished . . .
I see a boy of five on a chimney-top
Nude against the moon
Urinating silver on the city . . .
The moon smiles . . .

A ferry boat carries yellow waters about her,
Pier bells clang . . .
Beside a heap of pig-iron on the dock the 'longshoreman's daughter
Is honeying the captain's son . . .

"Yes," says the salesman, fresh from the Lackawanna Limited,
His hands on the steel of the ferry gates,
"Say what you want, there's nothing like her . . .
Good old Girl . . .
She's the skyline all right, all right . . .
O that Golden Woolworth Tower!
Out of five and ten cent pieces he pulled a skyscraper
Biggest on Earth . . .
De-mocracy, I tell yer . . ."

They eat in the Childs' Restaurants at two in the morning:
Buckwheat cakes with corn syrup,
Mugs of coffee on marble slabs . . .

In New Orleans, Deadwood, Key West and Council Bluffs,
In Portland, Oregon, and Portland, Maine,
A young woman has so multiplied her image
That while she sits in the flesh sipping a lemonade in Los Angeles,
The movie millions laugh and cry, watching her loveliness in rags in the Rockies . . .
"Ain't Mary Pickford a darling?"

The Baltimore trolley cars go jammed with summer fluff and straw hats
Out to Electric City,
Blazing, booming, shrieking . . .
And come back crowded down silent avenues . . .

(Trolleys along the Alantic Coast,
Trolleys in the Alleghenies,
Trolleys making the loop in soot-soft Pittsburgh,
Trolleys in the dark streaking a flare through moon-lit countryside.)

Coney Island skims golden platters along the edge of the Atlantic Ocean . . .
Ten young dolphin women sport in the heaving breakers,
They shriek and scatter as the lifeboat swings among them . . .

Down beside the cottonfields
A line of shanties:
Mammy sings: "Deep River,"
With a dark child at her bosom . . .
Pickaninny cries like white trash for the moon . . .
The young Negroes are singing
Banjo-tunes . . .

On door-steps in Denver
The white shimmering girls
Laugh lightly while the spick-and-span boys
Try to be men in love . . .

Above the Grand Canyon of the Colorado,
A little out of St. Paul,
Not far from Cleveland,
In the swaying cushioned Pullmans under yellow bulbs
The porters are making up the berths . . .
All the commercial American hotels
Have electric lights, individual bathrooms, valet service, and are fireproof skyscrapers . . .

Conventions are breaking up their meetings in the ball-rooms . . .
Out in the streets the cars clash, the boys shout "extras" . . .

Atlanta is sweltering to-night,
But Minneapolis is cool . . .
New York is full of the sea, lazy warm and moon-drunk . . .

It's odd to think that the hospitals, the almshouses, and the Morgues
Are crowded with wrecks and corpses . . .
It's odd to think of suicides in hall bedrooms, or down by the dreaming sea, or along the Ohio . . .
It's odd to think of an East-Side room in gas-light
And a greasy father with a grand passion
Tearing his hair like Othello because his daughter is ruined . . .
Killing, thieving, quarrelling, hunger—
America is like a bloated body swelling with balked desire . . .
The air grows hotter, the din louder,
Glasses are snapped, the wine spills over, the carrousel whirls,
The moon pours madness,
The moon has turned our brains, and the wild demon is loosed. . .

Yet where the garden
Glories over the rocks of the mountain,
Larkspur and rose look faded in the brilliant moon;
They die into the dew-touched air,
And in the quiet
Two lovers sigh, content . . .
Their world, a circle of hills,
A moon, a bed, themselves . . .

All night long the Pittsburgh foundries flare:
You can't turn off the furnaces, you can't put out the fires:
The United States with electric lights
Sparkles all night long . . .

NOCTURNE

I

1

MOONLIGHT and Autumn: floods of silver,
A waterfall,
Pour over cliffs of space
On crouching hills and camel-backed forests and crowded gardens.

I, too, a moon reflect
The essence of sunlight of old days
And in the silver of memory
Relive youth.

2

The city holds up her chimneys like rain-barrels to catch moonlight,
The ocean drinks silver
To bathe in a pale tinge of green her ships and fishes,
A woman leans from a window
And is a silver shower
On my heart beneath.

3

Wash after dying wash
The sea, low-singing, spans the illimitable shadow of the shore
With silver bridges . . .

One pine has moon-soaked needles
That faintly rustle when the night breathes . . .
Silence
Throbs in the ear-drums, as if in the highest skies
A music of stars
Were played behind walls of glass, and I could not hear . . .

4

A child looks up through the window from his bed
And the face of the moon is the countenance of his first god;
His eyes stained silver
Are round with awe.

Now, years later,
I mercilessly stare through changed vision
At a dead planet.

5

A boy is kissing a girl
In the shadow of a doorway . . . the long street
Sounds empty beside them, vacantly grey in the moon . . .
Her hair is soft in his hand,
Her lips
Are trembling hotly at his . . .

A passion of old cities
Pours a thrill through their hearts,
An old passion of desperate love
Binds them with warm arms . . .

The watchman is trying the doors, and stalks by, smiling . . .
A ripple of sea-wind, singing a silver moon-song, trips up the street . . .

But this passes in fire
From lips to lips, to the beloved woman,
And what was, is,
Old love, a gift to new.

II

1

Night grows vaster
With simulation of intense death . . .

At one o'clock
The mountain-farm sleeps
In coop and stable, barn and house;
The forest slumbers
Like an eagle spread-wing on her brood . . .
Nests are a rhythm of faint dream,
Gardens are graves . . .

2

Like the last soul alive on a dead planet
I sit with my candle,
Unmoved by the majestic march of silence . . .

My open window
Is a chute for moon-beams;
Transfigured, the floor receives them . . .

3

In intense, vast death
My brain burns,

Burns like the candle:
We are two flames . . .
We two are awake and burning into the night . . .

My brain burns:
Vivid reaches of battleground, heaped with young bodies . . .
Streets of secret windows:
Faces remembered . . .

4

Silence marches with invisible ranks from sky to sky,
From coast to coast;
My blood-drops move in their courses
As the planets in theirs . . .

The moon like a prow
Plows the ocean of ether . . .
And my soul is a moon
Catching the light of my lost sun
And sieving it through silver
For a spread over seas and dunes, over cities and hills,
To behold the perishing living through the immortal dead.

III

1

Who loves the night
When light
Is of other worlds and of other times?

Who shrinks from seeing faces as they are,
And dust,

And glaring streets of noon,
And garbage?

Whose soul sheds on the world
Silvery beams
Of time-transfigured memories,
Blurring the angles with twilight,
Burying the ugly in shadow?

2

The meadow-lark drops
His sunny dew of song
On meadow-grass . . .

Robin is in the garden
Wetting his wings among the roses:
A myriad of lives
Take away the lonely nocturne of my heart.

Harvests to gather, apples to crate,
Grapes for the crushing . . .
Squirrels and farmer are afoot . . .
The woods jet scarlet.

3

Such a fire in the skies is the sun
My moon pales, and whitens, dying . . .
The strength of fire
Quenches my stars and shuts through my boundless soul
A narrow sky of day . . .
My blood sets toward the task, my spirit is whittled
To a blade of deeds. . . .

The hidden is revealed,
The revealed is hidden.

GREY EVENING

IN the loved melancholy of grey evening
We smoke and are still . . .

In the loved melancholy of grey evening
Mountains rimming the world in a misty ring
Circle our hill of dark green timber, and wild garden, and rose-pillared house.

Roll, you clouds, from east to west,
You smokes from the pipe of the coming Night . . .
Glistening he comes, the shaggy wanderer,
Brooding on the dark hard Earth.

Round us the trees are singing
A reminiscence from the dawn of time
When their tips peeped from the floods
And the song of the sea was heard . . .

Like surf, they sing . . .

In the loved melancholy of grey evening
This sound has the joy of strong dark things.

Roll, you smokes, from east to west,
The grey old Chief puffs his pipe of Peace . . .
His cold rain-air shall be lead on your eyelids
And deep sleep draw us down . . .

We smoke and are still:
The heart is vague with strong dark things, with roots and
Earth,
With age like rocks;
Its throb is warm with the dark human.

But we are still,
But we are very still,
In the loved melancholy of grey evening,
O hushed, remote and still,
In the loved melancholy of grey evening,

MORNING SONG

MORNING is my time.
I must have the early sun shine through this song.

I love the sky cloudless, a radiance of quivering blue,
The sun not too high up:
The month May or October:
A blithe hardiness in the wind, and the budding or harvest of flowers:
The earliest or latest birds:
The city streets golden with a spring morning and gay with toilers,
Or brilliant with autumn and the more zestful air . . .

Happy is the man who wakes up fresh from sound sleep,
A song in his heart, vigorously rising and bathing himself,
Ardent with thirst for vivid life,
Laughing that his eyes do not open on some other planet,
But they open here, and he finds himself at home on the old Earth,
And meets again the people he knows,
The woman he loves, his children, his enterprises,
And goes to his work throbbing with the news of the world,
And loves his work—the machinery, the puzzling problems—
And comes home at night for his silence among books,
Or his vibrant speech among familiar friends,
Or the mystery of union with the woman . . .

Happier is this man if he is an in-goer as well as an out-goer,
If he is a traveller and explorer in the interior life of man,
At home with all visions, the processions of the stars and of the ages,
The daring and defiant intuitions of the soul . . .

I have been doubting and drooping . . .
I am one of those who are born with a stoop-shouldered spirit—
I am a night-soul, son of the darkness . . .
No wonder I love the morning and the unclouded dazzle of the sun,
And the unselfconscious joy of birds,
And am drawn mightily to women who sparkle, sport and laugh,
And adventurous men of action . . .

But in myself, I am only too ready to lean to my own beloved darkness,
The temptation of sorrow and lament,
The baying of the hounds of hate and suspicion,
Jealousy, distrust and suffering:
I am only too ready to give myself to the tide of blackness,
Voluptuary of despair . . .

Stand up, my soul: this is a good morning for a fresh start,
The snow lies on the sills, and is thick on the pavements,
The air is keen, the city at work . . .

Is not this the darkest year of the Earth?
So much more the need of courage, boldness, battle, faith!

THE RAINBOW

I

THE storm dies . . .
Clouds,
Their black anger spent,
Soften into creamy gauze, and float apart, and heaven
Bathed, breaks blue . . .

West
The low sun pours fire
Through a white well,
East
A rainbow
Trembles . . .

Round us the Earth
Laughs rainily . . .
The wet garden sparkles,
The wet robin sings . . .

The hard rain flailed
Fragrance from grass and dust and mint and rose
And the air
Is perfume . . .

We drink,
As if the body were a mouth,

The seen world of brilliant hills
Sunned and rainbowed,
The tasted world, fresh, cool, and odorous,
The heard world of wind-dapple, bird-song, human voices . . .
And the felt world
Of heavenly peace.

The rainbow arches
From soul to soul,
Our dark clouds whiten,
Floating like reveries of song,
Blue of heaven breaks
Through the heart's fire . . .
Together we laugh low,
At peace.

II

Here is peace . . .
But that black storm,
That whirlwind storm,
Thunders through the human world,
Stripping the forest of a generation
Of blossoms and young leaves . . .

Millions,
Upgazing,
Wait for the divine arch whereunder
Armies shall march with evening song
Of heavenly peace,
And the perfumed winds
Blow off the sulphurous vapours
And the sky's blue
Break through the battle-smoke . . .

They wait, dying;
And it comes too late
For the world's youth,
And it comes never
For doomed humanity . . .

For this is a storm
Which has raged since the dawn of time,
This is a storm
Between the demons and gods in the human soul,
This is a storm
Under every roof of man,
And in every body of flesh . . .

But this generation
Has gathered each soul's tempest into one black heaven
Of rolling lightning-riven storm,
And the deep horror of humanity
Is nakedly revealed
In one great Doomsday . . .

III

Shall peace be peace?
It shall not be
Save along the path of the ascension,
The path no eyes have seen,
No feet have felt . . .

Above man lies peace,
Among the evening hills
Where the late robin
Sings in the sparkling garden,
Where the rainbow
Trembles in the east,

Where the sinking sun
Pours splendour through a well of cloud . . .

Above man
And his unregenerate desires,
His power-hunger, primal lust,
Above man
In a world which the race inhabits with hills and animals,
With sun and storm,
A world vaster
Than cities and empires,
A world where the gods
Envelop and transcend the marketplace,
A world whose prizes
Are not fame or power or wealth,
But that blest harmony
Which pays itself . . .

Among those hills ascended
The spirit stands alone, and says, "I am,"
And to God, "Thou art,"
And to Nature, "Thou, too, art,"
And to man, "Thou art,
But what thou seekest, I seek not,
In this ascension."

When man overcomes man
Then peace dawns,
The storm dies . . .
And in the west
The low sun pours fire
Through a white well,
And in the east
A rainbow
Trembles . . .

SHADOW

SUNDOWN to-night
Is not like something out in the world,
But like a memory
Seen in vague pictures of the mind . . .

Ashes of sunset,
And mournful remembrances in grey
In some west beyond the west,
And the sickle moon
Like the sun's ghost remaining behind,
Tinted with the transient colors of the changing dusk,
And Earth
Mourning, not really, but in echoes
Through the windy darkness of phantom trees
And night
Closing cold on the heart . . .

Closing cold
On the chill tomb of the shrouded memories . . .
No moon-memories
Of beautiful dancers bathed by moonlight,
Wild loves by wilder seas,
And youth singing on the gleaming housetops,
But the damp cellar-ghosts,
The ugly insane spirits,
Death's-head revellers . . .

Evil is evil, throbs the heart,
Evil is evil . . .
From their gigantic graves in man
The titanic powers
Break, and with steps of earthquake, stalk,
Proclaiming war . . .

The multitudes of the Earth are gathered in a jungle,
The torches flare under the new moon,
In the phantom forest the naked millions
Hold orgy,
Calling on Mumbo-Jumbo and Satan,
Breaking the taboo of blood,
And in dionysian fury
Doing massive murder . . .

Let not the murderer call
His trade by a noble name,
But let us look on the dead
And see the naked evil . . .

For Doomsday is upon us, and this is the great harvesting of
human evil,
Now we reveal what we are
Though we say what we are is the enemy,
We lay bare the buried,
Ourselves the harvesters and the harvest,
We are cut down in our ripe evil
And are done to death, self-slaughtered . . .

No God overlooks the battle,
There are no Valkyries to bear the heroes to bliss,
No Jove and no Jehovah
Blend this vengeance with pity,

No Jesus walks through the mangled corn of No Man's Land . . .
We that have slain our gods
Gaze at empty skies,
But robed with their unslayable power
We would-be gods are demons . . .

It is madness
That dooms the world,
For we have been far too sane to behold
The irrational glory beyond our powers,
Far too sane
To conquer our machinery
With senseless pity and love,
Far too sane
For meditation and self-conquest . . .
But the heart has a power in it
Which becomes a devastation
If it is not released in splendour,
And the universe
Is forever unconquerable and its majesty
Forever awful . . .

Dreaming we have slain mystery
We are toys of a mysterious doom,
And dreaming that we are gods of intelligence,
Look, we are slaves of murderous passion . . .
We aimed at a garden
And wrought a shambles,
We dreamed of a Golden City
And made a Land of Graves . . .

The midnight passes
But the madness does not pass . . .
It burns itself out like a conflagration,

And in the wild light
The orgy continues,
And shall continue
Till the ashes of a civilization
Become the tomb of a race.

HYMN TO DEATH

I WOULD raise a slow and majestic hymn to Death,
I would sing over the dust . . .
The ages open, and they are bins of dust,
They are bins of the dust of the once-dreaming clay,
They are valleys mounded over
With dust of our unremembered, our fathers and mothers . . .
And we shall bring
As gifts our bodies and all of our troubled splendour
To crumble with them, to be silent with them . . .

We have come through the dark entry to this life,
We have lived a little while with love and longing,
Now in the end we go
To cool quiet,
Now in the end
There is a laying down of what has risen up . . .

We have had youth and desire,
We have not been troubled by ghosts;
Yoked with a god we fought for the glory of fame,
And the crown of power;
We ate the bread, we drank the wine, flesh lay with flesh;
But the bats of the summer dusk are weaving
Cobweb vestures for the dead,
And in the brown air ghosts
Crowd through the gates of the ages.

Before we were born we were indentured to the dark Master,

And we carry a bond in our hearts that must be sealed . . .
When the Master calls, we turn, stricken, and go
Naked and queerly alone to the dark exit,
And none is beside us, and the last clasp is unloosened,
And silence and darkness take us.

We but experience
What all have known:
We but endure
What every living soul has alone suffered:
Eager or reluctant we too travel a road more worn
With human feet than all others . . .
We that have sung, are silent,
And we that have fought, are princes of peace . . .
We make our bivouac with an unending night
And even dreams are done.

Yet are we lovers
Of all-erasing Death:
Life was a restless bride we ravished
But never won,
We lay with her in the midst of battle and our kisses were vain:
Our love grew feverish, balked,
Our tears dropped round our laughter . . .
All that we snatched from her, was a flame that passed,
And all that we gave, turned ashes . . .

It was then we heard
Another love-call in our hearts,
A longing after some healing, old and forgotten;
It was then the calm beloved face of Death appeared
Far in the backward mist of our depths;
It was then that silence became our treasure,
And sleep grew sweet . . .

Then we found we were
Shelterless and unmothered multitudes,
Then we drew again
Great wings of love over our skies,
Dark wings of one who broods
And gives solace and silence . . .

I would raise a slow and majestic hymn to Death,
I would sing over the dust . . .
I would set aflutter the starry veil of Night
That *she* wears, sitting in the Deep;
I would lift the veil, and see the shadows of her arms,
And her beautiful dark face,
I would see in her eternal arms the races of men
Resting forever;
I would see her grave and understanding eyes that look upon man;
I would know the other love, which is cool and calm;
And I would praise Death, the secret bride.

SUNSET

I

1

NOW is sunset,
The nightfall lightens
Over the funeral pyre of the day . . .

On a balcony we
Sweep the round world whose rim
Is edged with fire . . .

Unstirring cumulus cloud
Is purple and scarlet . . . bearded cloud of the west
Is incandescent . . .
Beyond and below
Our planet is a fire, and the flaming
Makes our sky a glory over the dark green Earth . . .
A painted glory:
No wind breathes:
No tree stirs:
The world of life for a breathless moment
Is ordered and is art:

But we live . . .

2

Inarticulate, stripped of desire,

Motionless,
We yet live . . .
Our lifted faces are lighted,
Our bodies are torches touched to the fixed fire of sunset
And kindled with the unburning flame of dream . . .

We see the little cottage
Painted among the painted trees:
We see the clover fields, lush green,
The western hills, dark blue,
The wild, windless garden,
Grey stones . . .

Daring to tap and crack this glass of silence
A robin tweets . . .

3

Earth never seemed capable of this:
Her beautiful hours
Sweet with orchards or rough with rain-storm
Or grave with stars
Came with the ease of familiar things
Woven of the weather of the human heart:
But this
Is not of the Earth we know:
And our eyes see
A life or a death beyond and behind, within and without
Our life . . .

We live, but neither memory
Nor yet vision
Warms the naked moment . . .
We merely breathe, gaze and wonder . . .
We only know
That the world of human life is a capsule
Floating in vaster existences,

And that the melting of it
Would be no death
But an emergence . . .

II

1

Earth, over her rims,
Is a fire . . .
The human world, builded by hands,
Ivied by ages,
The human soul, born out of nature,
And in splendour of superstition
And tear-bought wisdom
Grown rich and weary,
Are at end of Day,
In sunset . . .

The magic capsule
Glowing inside with cathedrals and coliseums,
Sounding with an endless song,
Lighted with heroes and with gods,
With dreams swaying crowds,
Is melting . . .

The world begun by Egypt and Babylonia,
Built temple-high by Greece,
And pinnacled by Europe,
Dissolves . . .

2

We did not know
That the accustomed, the fixed eternal,
Could become a phantom

And fade in dying light of its own sun . . .
No dream of Doomsday
Could forbode the doom . . .

But it is here, with the whole planet
Raimented in flame . . .
The whole planet
On its funeral pyre . . .
And the sun sets
That rose on Pharaoh,
And the day ends
That dawned with Homer . . .

3

It ends, yet the spared live;
They live,
But neither memory nor vision
Warms the naked moment;
They merely breathe, gaze and wonder . . .
And the doom falls
On silence . . .

III

1

They live and gazing
In this visionary hour
They see a trace of the world outside
The dissolving world . . .

And they know
That world has been slowly dawning
And the light of its growing dawn
Mingles with this sunset

And gives it this breathless splendour . . .

That dawn rose
In brains like Galileo's,
Its light gathered
In spirits like Nietzsche's;
Its kindled sun
Burnt out the old sun,
And the dying creatures of that sun
Sink in the beams of the new human fire-god . . .

2

Those beams shall break
On the young green of a new spring,
With the nations gathered in a single song
And the bright intelligence
Of a new youth raying through the human spirit . . .
With a new self
For each soul that wins it, orbed like a fresh-born planet,
And swinging in harmony with all other planets;
With a new sky
Storm-cleansed of old demons and gods,
With a new earth
For new adventures . . .

3

Those beams shall break
On the second Day of Man:
But in this hour
Of awful sunset
We do not know that Day:
We only know
Our dissolving world floats in a vaster existence,
And this dissolution
Is no death,
But an emergence.

SONGS OUT OF MULTITUDE

EUROPA

EUROPA

THE dark years, the dreadful years are upon me . . .

THE VOICE OF EGYPT

Whither goest thou, Europa, whither goest thou dusty and
grown aged and withering at the breasts?
Thou hast not crouched in the desert, mouthing the sand-
storm,
Remembering thy Ptolemies, and she that floated golden down
the Nile and so
Down the stream of the ages of the memories of man . . .

EUROPA

But the dark years, and the days of bleak old age are upon
me . . .
Once my rosy nipples were lipped by nations and a great
people drank of them . . .
A great people with kings on horseback, and a multitude of
banners went down the breeze, and their bards
Gathered them in nations . . .

THE VOICE OF PERSIA

What hag is this, that against the black rifts of the storm,
and blown by the tempest
Stalks crazily, mumbling? Is it thou, Europa?

Thou hast not seen great Babylon fallen, gone down with Marduk,
Nor thine empire with such great kings as mine in Susa and in Ninevah
Struck to the Earth by a sudden Alexander . . .
Thou art not merely an Asian breath from beyond the desert and the ancient rivers
Strange with Assyrian song and Arabian rumor . .

EUROPA

I wither in a great noise: I shrink and grow dry and barren in a splendid thunder:
I am stripped of the glory of the presence of God, and the grace of my children's Father:
My song is stopped, and my vision has crumbled with the drooping of my breasts . . .

THE VOICE OF GREECE

What chariots roll by, horseless, smoking and spitting flame like the dragon?
My smokes curled from the bivouac-fires on the shores,
And from the kindly hearth where the housewife, spinner of golden yarns,
Sat in purple shadows, weaving . . .
But what smokes are these, stormy and black, that go up out of the disemboweled Earth,
Dreadful, and as a vapour herself, this old woman wanders?
Is it thou, Europa, conqueress of antiquity?
Is it thou, wailing?

EUROPA

Greece, they have despoiled me! Mine enemy comes, the merciless scalper-user, he, cunning with tools,

Glass-eyed Science, whose sapless children have songless names
—Industrialism, pah! and Democracy!
They that care nothing for man's glory, but stoop low
Probing in entrails, spewing their filth out of mills,
Slaying my Gods, and my prophets, and the grandeur of heroes,
For a base business of comfort and a littleness of deeds and of people . . .
I wither, my heart like a dried flower-pod: the heavens are empty.

THE VOICE OF ROME

What is this iron on the seas, and what is this beating of a heart of steel?
Loud bells clamour, and there are glaring cities smothered in the fume of their own mouths!
Where goest thou, Europa? And why art thou as one scared by lions in the arena?
Thou hast no Rome to mourn, and the imperial eagles
Screaming in death-throes before the tramplings of the Huns!

EUROPA

Rome, thine agony to mine, is as a child's to the woe of a woman whose love is slain in her heart,
For thy death was my birth, but my dying is the dying of the race of man,
The proud white conqueror dies in me . . .
Man, white in his glory, in pomp against the heavens,
Armed with his God, is gone . . .

THE VOICE OF SYRIA

Who art thou, great old woman, fallen down on the banks of darkness,

And writhing as if a serpent coiled in thy womb?
Did I not send thee Asia for a staff and a vision against the North?
Did I not send thee the love of the young man, Jesus, who died so early,
And in that love wert thou not young and more beautiful than antiquity
Building with thy fingers spired churches and sending men up spiral stairways
Into the ante-chambers of the Lord?
Art thou not healed in Christ?

EUROPA

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets,
Jesus is slain a second time, and I am the Cross . . .
For the people are very busy with their engines and with their formulas,
Soft in their comforts, stinking in their poverty, they stir,
Scrambling, forgetting, far from me . . .

(*Silence*)

THE VOICE OF ANTIQUITY

With what swellest thou, Europa, and with what quickenest thou
So that thou bowest with the burden of all women?

EUROPA

God, what stirring is this, what ancient stirring?
My flesh quivers, and a piercing pain is in my body.
Can these bones shelter a child, can these sagging breasts ripen again with milk?

Can the blasted pine on the heath blossom and break forth
in a new Spring?
Who mocks me with a death-bringing birth?

AMERICA

Europa, Old Wife, why do you lie there trembling and
whispering?

EUROPA

Thou hast wrought something upon me:
Thou hast pierced me with thy terrible spear of gold . . .
O thou, the trampler on all old love, slayer of Gods, young
Midas of the West,
Thou gross machine, thou money-changer in my temple,
Thou harsh youth using me as a brothel-woman is used on
a summer's night . . .
Thou, reeking with thy greed, but mouthing thy rhetoric of
Democracy,
Thou hast begotten upon me a vile thing in mine old age . . .
My people are bought by thee, and my children are become
as thou art . . .
And now thou smitest me down with unwelcome progeny.

AMERICA

Old Woman, why do you begin to cry and roll around in
agony
And cover your continent with broken cities and with blood?

EUROPA

Hear me, Heavens, I chant the chant of death, the roll of
armies,

I burn in the fires of the Earth, the ancient fires that go smoking
With agony blurring the bright sun—O Man, the sorrowful!
O voices of a great lamentation!

AMERICA

What is this sorrow of great peoples, and this lamentation of multitudes,
Ships go down, and cities topple, and the world crumbles!
Are you not dying, Old Woman?
Are these not death-throes?

EUROPA

I am dying, America . . . I am dying! Save me and help me!

AMERICA

Why do you clutch me, Old Woman, why do you drag me into your withered arms,
Why do you wail in my ears?

EUROPA

The doom falls and now death
Drinks down greedily the glory of my two thousand years . . .

AMERICA

She lies still . . . she lies spent and still . . .
But what is this beside her?

Yea, what is this beside her?

AMERICA

What opens in my heart?
What little song begins to sing so purely in my heart?
What wonder and what miracle is this?
What child is this, so poor and helpless, lying in the arms of
the spent mother?

EUROPA

Babe, my babe . . .
O my breasts rise to meet thy tiny lips,
My breasts rise, and a faint new life runs down my blood,
And I am glorified, glorified . . .
Drink, little stranger, drink from the mother.

FOLK-SOUL

1

I HEARD someone singing about Russia
A freeman's song,
And I heard the old song of the boatmen of Mother Volga . . .
Dark sad songs . . .
A folk-soul changes but slowly . . .

I thought of the wind of freedom that blows on the steppes . . .
And I thought of you, Gorky,
The dark young years,
Your strange little Grandmother . . .

Deeper than poverty and riches,
Deeper than oppression and tyranny,
Deeper than ignorance,
Deep as life is the folk-soul, and it changes but slowly . . .

2

I heard someone singing of America
A cabaret song,
And I heard the old song of Mother dear, come bathe my forehead . . .
Sweet thin songs . . .
A herd-spirit deepens but slowly . . .

I thought of the land of the free where the emigrants settle . . .

Are they free? I asked, are they free?
And I thought of the public schools,
And broadcast bathtubs,
And movies and newspapers . . .

Czar-scouraged Russia: free America . . .
Gorky's Grandmother:
George M. Cohan . . .

3

Who shall refuse to be of the party of bread and liberation?
Work for all: light for all: power for all?
Who shall set himself against the tides whose phantom moon is Freedom?
And who shall forget old Tolstoi's wisdom: that freedom is of the spirit?

4

I heard someone singing about Russia
A freeman's song,
And I heard the old song of the boatmen of Mother Volga . . .
Dark sad songs . . .
A folk-soul changes but slowly.

THE FIRES OF PITTSBURGH

FIRES—
Fires out of the dark—
(Coal-barges swing on the Ohio)
Fires, fires of Steel—
(Ore floats the ripple of the slow Monongahela)
Fires, fires of Pittsburgh—
Lo, lightnings lifting her sky of smoke, and dropping it,
Lo, the young American city,
On her heights, in the fork of her rivers,
And ringed with mills
Guarding her tracks and tonnage
Laboring day and night.

She is the womb of the Modern,
Strong young mother of cities and ships. . . .
She weaves the world with rails,
And webs the Earth with wires. . . .
Pittsburgh is *Labor,*
Pittsburgh is *Wealth,*
Pittsburgh is *Power.*
From these smokes, a nation,
From these fires, America.

O fires of Pittsburgh!
Is it only the Steel that shrieks as you twist and shape it?
Is this the howling of your hammers, the anguish of your cranes, the revolt of your engines?
Do I hear only this hell's music of mills?

Or is this the slaves' song of your lonely wrestlers with elemental flame and ore,—
The slaves' song,
The slaves' groaning and wailing in the dark,
The song of mastered men,
The sullen satanic music of lost and despairing humanity?

I will go lightly
By the lonely shanties clinging to the barren slopes. . . .
I will go softly
Where no birds sing,
Where the gas-lamps burn grey in the flimsy sodden milltown,
And from the lighted kitchens
The tired workmen throng the streets, tramping, tramping,
Tramping over the railroad bridge,
Tramping through the switch-yards,
For the Giant has blown his whistle
And the night-shift is on. . . .

Madly the night swirls
Lunging with engines—
The flames burst the roofs and shower golden snow,
The shrill-whistling yard-engines bump across the switches,
Switchmen swing lanterns, green, green, red,
The sudden headlights dazzle round the silhouettes of workmen,
This mill and that looms roaring, roaring,
Bells beat, whistles blow, shouts rise, and heaven
Rolls with unresting smokes,
Glares with livid lightning. . . .

Speed!
The young god speed!
The young god speed is at the wheel,
Whipping the engines,

Pacing the workers,
The mills roar their terrible triumph over time,
The great machines snatch at the hands of men,
And drag them in, and drag in the arms,
And drag at every muscle of the body. . . .
Speed! speed!
American speed!
Set the fires roaring,
Swing the blooms in faster,
Pile up the tonnage for a record-breaker,
Pile up the tonnage. . . . Strain, strain, you toilers!
Give us every ounce of your tireless energy. . . .
Work, till you crack, work till you are slag:
Work, till you age with fever and exhaustion,
Work, till we fling you out upon the rusty scrap-heap. . . .

Open slides the floor-door: the soaking pit is dazzling. . . .
Down comes the crane-hand and dips into the fire:
It's the ten-ton ingot she is lifting up,
It's the ten-ton ingot, white-hot and sizzling. . . !
It's a lost soul shrieking snatched from out the burning. . . .

Clank, clank, clatter, the bloom runs down the rollers,
Crash! it hits the wringers!
Whong! the sparks are flying!
Klong-al, klong-al, it howls like a lioness,
Giving up its soul as it flattens to a sheet. . . .

Noise, soot, chaos. . . .
I wander, finding men,
Half-naked men with wet shining bodies,
Men with forks, and men at the levers,
Men on cars, and men behind the engines,
Fire-glaring men with shovels at the furnaces. . . .

Men, men. . . .
I watch, and I am silent. . . .

(O dance of death!
Dance of the fires of death!
Fires, fires of Pittsburgh!)

There are hills, beloved, with mountain-gardens,—
There we grow roses, useless beautiful roses
For the delight of our souls. . . .

There is a room, beloved, on the city square,—
There we make songs, useless beautiful songs
As gifts to each other's hearts.

We have known how the body, like a bud,
Opens beyond Earth, and beyond riches,
Into vision, song, love. . . .

We have known the mystery of each other,
Clinging in the mystery of the Night,
With stars and long silence. . . .

There is a fire beyond fire. . . .
There is a fire in love
There is a fire in song. . . .

O Man, thou flame!
Thou who hast in thee this vague vision, this power of desire,
Hast thou traversed a planet with trade and speech,
Steel swimmers of the sea, steel cities capped with cloud,
Steel cannonades of destruction,
Steel strength of Civilization,
And yet, art thou *darkness?*

Psychic Giant!

Thou apparition appearing on a planet teeming with little animals,
Emerging strong from the twilight of storm-lost creatures,
Thou envisager of distances and ages,
Thou binder of elemental powers,
Thou tameless fighting god of Earth!

Art thou this, builder of Pittsburgh?
Why then this sighing in the abyss?
Why from thy grimy lips this slaves' song, this slaves' song in the fires,
This slaves' wailing and groaning,
This sullen satanic music of despair and death?

Art thou caught in thine own creation?
Giant, art thou locked in the arms of this Giant of thine own making,
This brainless Giant?
Are the two eternally wrestling,
Thou of the shanties clinging to the barren hills,
Thou of the tawdry mill-town
Wrestling with Steel, struggling with Tonnage, fighting with Time?

There is no glory in the world that coops thee here,
Giant of Labor,
There is no joy. . . .
There is no delight in the gaudy Heaven lit by the fires of this Hell,
No delight among the masters ever speeding,
No delight for the pilers-up of Power,
There is no joy in America. . . .
There can come no song for fine ears out of the sweating of the multitude,

There can come no splendor of the soul out of the grinding
of the slaves. . . .
But there comes madness,
There comes the rising whirlwind of riches.
There comes the hurricane-fury of lust to be great,
There comes a wind smiting nation against nation,
There comes confusion of tongues, and storm,
Storm whirling the towers, toppling the cities, blasting the
countryside,
Storm shattering Civilization—the Abyss
Opens, a world goes down.

And thou, Labor,
Art sucked into the cyclone—
It is thy blood that must redden the fields of France,
It is thy breast and thy face that must stop the shells. . . .

Fires,
Fires out of the dark
(Coal barges swing on the Ohio)
Fires, fires of Steel—
(Ore floats the ripple of the slow Monongahela)
Fires, fires of Pittsburgh—
From these smokes, a nation,
From these fires, America. . . .

But that morning shall break
When the Sleeper in thy fires awakens,
But that morning shall break
When thy giant Slave rises and deals with thee. . . .
With a shrug of his shoulders, those flies, his masters, shall
drop,
With a stroke of his terrible fist he shall clean out the mills,
He shall seize the machines, bestriding the engines that rode
him. . . .

When that morning breaks
The Sun of Labor in splendour
Shall illume a new world,
When that morning breaks
This Giant shall call to the Giants
And the Nations be one. . . .
When that morning of glory breaks
The Earth's hosts arisen
Shall be streaming with light. . . .
Song shall burst from their lips,
And flame out of darkness. . . .
Song shall leap from their lips,
And the glory
Be given to Man for his marring, his making, his death or his life.

THE SONG OF THE UPRISING

I—Joy

JOY wings his way,
— (O bells of heaven!)
Joy wings his irresistible way,
—(O winds, O sun!)
Joy wings his irresistible, his radiant, his ineluctable way,
—(Morning! morning of the winds,
Morning strong with song!)
Joy wings, wings, *wings* his way
And now the wild great song of dawn
Mounts heaven on beams of light
Scattering the dew in the path of the veering bee,
And from the house the girl and boy bare-headed
Come fresh from sleep
And lift young voices toward blue skies . . .

Lift young voices toward blue skies
Meeting the young god, Joy.

Joy is the carrier of news . . .
He laughs over the battlefields . . .
Joy is the sun . . .
He shines on the democracies . . .
Joy is exultant with tidings . . .
He flings on the Earth in the road of the hosts the luminous
flame of the future . . .

O the Earth, it is bled,
It is black, clawed with death,
But victory, but victory, but irrespressible victory
Shouts from the lips of Joy
Who shall raise up the dead.

I will make a prophecy
To your swelling heart,
That the heavens open
Presently with Peace . . .
I will make a prophecy of glory
To your dark-swelling heart . . .
The peoples shall be one,
The Earth shall be our home,
The children shall lead us forth with a scattering of roses,
And the heavens in all their splendour of stars shall sing:
"One people, one planet."

O my heart!
How wonderful is the age we dwell in . . .
We are climbing up on the new tableland of man,
Beyond cedars of sorrow, beyond hemlocks of lamentation,
There where the grass blows wild,
There where the oak and the maple sway in the wind,
There where the festival is held, and the sun gleams on the steel of the workshops . . .
Gleams on the steel and on the miraculous flesh of men's faces . . .

(Hear, O softly, O faintly, sweetly,
Hear the cooing murmur of the mothers,
The lisp of laughing babes,
The bird-like love-notes, the lark-like mate-calls
Of passionate girls and boys,
And hear, hear,
Voices of men together in workshops where work is glory.)

Truly triumphant from the massive enginery of destruction and battle
Where great guns levelled Louvain and rifled Europe of grandeur,
Truly triumphant the saved shall stand and march with a blowing of the trump
And march with a throbbing of the drum
Heroic and renewed to the lands of the new age . . .

They shall march!—
(O Joy, thou news-bringer!)
They shall march!—
(O Joy, thou sun in the windy heavens!)
They shall march!—
(O Joy, thou art approaching beamed with the glory of the free!)
They shall march, they shall sing, they shall swing with radiant ranks,
Down the fields, down the streets, down the continental roads,
They shall march, they shall ship, they shall fly on the planes of rejoicing,
They shall be one mass of triumph in the peace that crowneth all.

II—Darkness

Death darkens, darkens . . .
—(O cry of breakers!)
Death darkens, darkens on the deeps . . .
—(O rocks, O sea!)
Death darkens, darkens on the moving, the interminable deeps . . .
—(Midnight! midnight of no stars!
Midnight bowed with cloud!)

Death darkens, darkens, *darkens,*
And the wild blown dirges of the sea
Break into lamentation,
Break into anguish on the rocks, on the sands, on the dunes,
Wail along the dunes, weep along the dunes,
And the sea cries,
And the wind skims the sea-tides with an empty moaning,
And the clouds crowd together dropping their tears upon the war-bled world . . .

O the black midnight!
Winds howl and sand blows,
The broom wails and snaps and the breakers burst writhing . . .
O the blackness of this midnight . . .

Must I walk these shores lost in grief?
Must I walk these stormy shores at the salt fringes of the tragic sea,
In a vision of the human Earth I tread,
In a vision of an Earth of men and women
Stripped and maimed,
Trapped and slain,—
Must I walk these naked shores, dreadfully, slowly, stricken in my heart?

Unbearable sorrow!
Fiendish anguish!
Among the old that line the streets, among the faded and the war-worn,
Radiant miles of youth glow by, laughing with the bugles,
Radiant rivers of youth flow by,
Flow into the trenches . . .

I see the Hell they have entered with its pitiless flame-fledged skies,
With its mud and stenchent carrion, with the murderer and the murdered . . .
I see the Hell they have entered and the radiance gone out . . .

O my heart . . .
How terrible is the age we dwell in .
None . . . none . . . none
Shall assuage great grief . . .
None . . . none . . . none
Shall restore the lost to us. . . .
Roll, muffled drums, you heart-beats of despair,
Boom, O you brass, for the burial of our boys.

I have mounted midnight
To gaze in the abyss,
In the midst of Heaven
Hangs a red, red heart . . .
I have mounted mournful midnight
To gaze in the abyss,
And I have seen that red heart
Dripping drops of blood . . .
That heart is the Earth,
In the darkness it hangs red,
In the darkness it bleeds red with human grief and anguish . . .

But is not the Earth as a husk of beauties and glories and powers
Which, stripped, reveals the kernel, the naked body of man?
Is not man her consummate miracle?
Is he not strong with engines and strong with soaring song?
Can he be this beast of the jungle?

Can he be this darkness-maker?
Has his great past opened only in this?

Sea of the interminable tides,
Sea, of dirges and of moving deeps, and of darkened song,
I will turn from you, I will call the beloved of my heart . . .
Turn and call her, that in her face
I may read of youth's betrayal,
And the treason of the strong . . .

They have betrayed us . . .
(Silence, you false seas!)
They have betrayed us . . .
(Silence, you lying dirge-singing seas!)
They have betrayed us . . .
(Silence, you seas awash with ignoble anguish!)
They have betrayed us, they have sold us, they have carried off our youth
To the slaughter, to the murder, to the deepest pits of Hell
They have betrayed us, they are traitors, we shall rise against their power,
We shall shake the Earth with tumult and the thunders of Revolt.

III—The Call

Whither goest thou, beautiful and beloved, O Earth,
Whither goest thou?

Dawn is not yet:
We sit in a cranny of the eastward rocks of the mountaintop;
Among shapes of the wind, shadows of the stars, and the Earth darker than the skies.

O my beloved,

Your hands are warm in my own, your hair blows against
my cheek:
You are glimmering beside me, your eyes bright with the
wild animal:
We are of the darkness of Earth dipped in the eddying gleam
of the heavens:
We taste the freshness of wind-blown pines.

Vastness . . . ten stars are gone . . .
Greyness . . . the Earth sighs . . .
Twilight . . . the East twinkles . . .

O rise, my beloved, rise, for the runners of the sun
Appear with their bugles upon the mountains and blow long
blasts of light
Swelling and shattering Night . . .
Rise, we must meet the miracle . . . Dawn's joy swells:
Stirring, Earth tosses her covers of the dark aside,
Laughing, leaps from her bed: naked, bathes in the dew . . .
Look, where the peeping chimney smokes, look, the grey lake,
Listen . . . the waking!
Birds are fluttering, brooks are babbling, leaves are
dancing, woodfolk scurry . . .
The color of the dawn
Scattered, drowns in blue . . .

We are blown on the topmost rock,
We cannot be still . . .
Your hair, my beloved, is a golden gale,
Your lips are cold . . .
Look to the East, behold . . .
Look—*gold* . . .
Pure gold, flame gold, growing, emboldening gold!
Mark!
The sons of light—

The sons of light charge Heaven on golden gallopers,
And struck out of fire, with song,
The morning star is born—
The morning star is born—the sun, the sun—*Day!*

(A shadow crosses the sun . . .
The Earth grows grey below us . . .
We are hushed of a sudden, and chilled . . .
Doubt . . . dread)

Whither goest thou, darkened and solemn, O Earth,
Whither goest thou?
Is there then, beloved, no forgetting of sorrow?
Must there be pausing for lamentation?
Is there an hour for cedars?
Shall the drums roll for the lost and the bugles blow for the dead?

I heard a voice say: None,
None shall heal empty arms.
I heard a voice say: None,
None shall assuage great grief . . .
For he is dead, whose young lips
She kissed in the intervals of song . . .
—In the intervals of song . . .

Death darkens, darkens,
(O cry of breakers!)
Death darkens, darkens on the deeps,
(O rocks, O sea!)
Death steals into the ecstasy of life,
Steals in, snatches the loved ones, and leaves bereaved hearts . . .

Beloved, beloved,
How can we abide on the mountain of our joy

Where even touched with sunrise we quiver through invisible
nerves to the ends of Earth,
And the agony of man darkens our dawn . . .
We must descend into the pit of a thousand million
outstretched, imploring hands,
The pit of bloody faces, and wailing lips . . .
Down to the sorrow of Earth,
The anguish of Man.

For Earth, like a staring maniac, bearing a firebrand,
Goes shrieking down the skies,
Shrieking "Famine," shrieking "Pestilence," shrieking
"War" . . .
That orb of destruction burns balefully in the august
magnificence of night . . .
The mad world runs amuck . . .
Is Man ending himself?
Is the miracle of that mind and passion which dreamed and
built Asia and Europe
Stopped in suicidal madness?
Beloved, were we born to see this, and to live this?
Are we among the doomed?

(Yet—what song is in my heart?
O has the mother heard the stir of life in her side?
Is there the faint, the tremulous stir of the unborn?)

Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And be ye uplift, you everlasting doors . . .
The glory of the Lord is risen upon us . . .
We shall not bend before the storm: we shall not bow
before great death:
We put the darkness from us with a loud shout:
We put the temptation of despair away with resolution:

We arise: we arise clothed in courage:
We arise: we are that which has refused darkness: we are MAN . . .
MAN, the fire-bringer,
MAN, the Creator.

We call mountain to mountain . . .
We raise a torch of Revolution . . .
We bring forth the peoples out of their darkness
And the nations out of their wrath . . .
We behold the Earth in parturition . . .
We see the Mother in birth-throes . . .
We greet the child with calls of welcome and the sound of cities of joy . . .

O, blow, you bugles, with triumph,
O, shout, you peoples, with victory . . .
Hurl down the mighty from their seats,
And raise yourselves to freedom . . .
Raise up yourselves, ye slaves and chained ones,
Raise up yourselves, ye toiling peoples . . .
Be upraised, ye sorrowers and ye spent ones,
Get up on the peaks of the morning and proclaim the triumph of Man,
The victory of Man,
Get up on the peaks of the morning and greet the child, the New Age,
On tablelands of democracy,
On heights of man, the creator,
Get ye up, get ye up, get ye up ye triumphing peoples . . .
New Man is born from the Old: Joy shall leap laughing from Sorrow.

THE IRONIC SPIRIT

WE have drunk deep—
This generation—
We have drunk deep of evil . . .

The ironic spirit
Was our wet-nurse,
And we milked her in the soft latitudes of the equator of dreams . . .
In zones of comfort
We sipped the milk of peace;
Not without a bitter taste in the mouth,
The taste of trade and of toil,
But the sweet savour of sinlessness,
Of the excellence of human nature,
For when the gods died
The legion of devils withered,
And when the blaze of the seraphs was put out
Hell's darkness also vanished . . .

So we grew up
In the cotton of an all-human world,
Sheltered in the sane cubicle of intelligence:
There were no storms, but those of the winds and the clouds,
No passions among the polite,
No evils that were not error . . .

We were a good race, in spite of the quagmire of poverty,
And when at last that should be abolished

Then in goodness, the reign of kindliness should triumph . . .

We pitied the past
Lost as it was in the magic mists of superstition,
The demon Past drinking hot blood from a skull,
The Past of pestilence and battle,
The tragic ignorant Past . . .

We seemed free
Because we thought freely,
And because we could telegraph instead of travel,
And of all the generations of men
We were the least tragic . . .

It was as if the ironic spirit
Had made our content complete
To deepen the horror of what lay in wait for us . . .
The generation that seemed born to suffer least
Has suffered as no generation before it,
And we that were so good
Are black with evil beyond our ancestors . . .
Our kindliness has shaped a fiend's devastation of hate,
And our milk of humanity has turned to vapours of venom . . .
Out of our supersanity has come a universal madness,
And from our antiseptic safeties a devil's disregard for pain and death . . .
On the corpse of our Brotherhood of Man
We have erected a monument of slaughter,
And with the science that was to make us intelligent
We have taught cruelty new cunning . . .

The ironic spirit smiles with a bitter satisfaction
As it gives us to drink deep,
Deep of all evil.

DEBS

FOUR great lovers rose in America . . .
One was hung:
One was shot:
One lived in solitude:
And one was jailed . . .

. . . . . .

The prairies, the valleys and the mountains of the ages are remembered because of great lovers who were there . . .
Drums and flags lay the cæsars to rest,
But the muffled drums roll by, dying, and we let them die . . .
When the great lover dies, in silence,
His grave becomes the fragrant mouth of an ever-swelling song:
These are the songs by which we live,
These are the suns that shine on us, stars and moons that sprinkle our nights,
Winds of reviving May, rains of dry summer . . .

. . . . . .

Gene Debs, this fragment song for you,
Living great lover through whom America lives.

MEMORIES OF WHITMAN AND LINCOLN

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd"
—W. W.

LILACS shall bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.
Spring hangs in the dew of the dooryards
These memories—these memories—
They hang in the dew for the bard who fetched
A sprig of them once for his brother
When he lay cold and dead. . . .
And forever now when America leans in the dooryard
And over the hills Spring dances,
Smell of lilacs and sight of lilacs shall bring to her heart these brothers. . . .
Lilacs shall bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Who are the shadow-forms crowding the night?
What shadows of men?
The stilled star-night is high with these brooding spirits—
Their shoulders rise on the Earth-rim, and they are great presences in heaven—
They move through the stars like outlined winds in young-leaved maples.

Lilacs bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Deeply the nation throbs with a world's anguish—
But it sleeps, and I on the housetops
Commune with souls long dead who guard our land at midnight,
A strength in each hushed heart—
I seem to hear the Atlantic moaning on our shores with the plaint of the dying
And rolling on our shores with the rumble of battle. . . .
I seem to see my country growing golden toward California,
And, as fields of daisies, a people, with slumbering upturned faces
Leaned over by Two Brothers,
And the greatness that is gone.

Lilacs bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Spring runs over the land,
A young girl, light-footed, eager. . . .
For I hear a song that is faint and sweet with first love,
Out of the West, fresh with the grass and the timber,
But dreamily soothing the sleepers. . . .
I listen: I drink it deep. . . .

Softly the Spring sings,
Softly and clearly:

"I open lilacs for the beloved,
Lilacs for the lost, the dead.
And, see, for the living, I bring sweet strawberry blossoms,
And I bring buttercups, and I bring to the woods anemones and bluebells . . .
I open lilacs for the beloved,

And when my fluttering garment drifts through dusty cities,
And blows on hills, and brushes the inland sea,
Over you, sleepers, over you, tired sleepers,
A fragrant memory falls . . .
I open love in the shut heart,
I open lilacs for the beloved."

Lilacs bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Was that the Spring that sang, opening locked hearts,
And is remembrance mine?
For I know these two great shadows in the spacious night,
Shadows folding America close between them,
Close to the heart. . . .
And I know how my own lost youth grew up blessedly in their spirit,
And how the morning song of the mighty native bard
Sent me out from my dreams to the living America,
To the chanting seas, to the piney hills, down the railroad vistas,
Out into the streets of Manhattan when the whistles blew at seven,
Down to the mills of Pittsburgh and the rude faces of labor . . .
And I know how the grave great music of that other,
Music in which lost armies sang requiems,
And the vision of that gaunt, that great and solemn figure,
And the graven face, the deep eyes, the mouth,
O human-hearted brother,
Dedicated anew my undevoted heart
To America, my land.

Lilacs bloom for Walt Whitman

And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Now in this hour I was suppliant to these two brothers,
And I said: Your land has need:
Half-awakened and blindly we grope in the great world. . . .
What strength may we take from our Past, what promise hold
for our Future?

And the one brother leaned and whispered:
"I put my strength in a book,
And in that book my love. . . .
This, with my love, I give to America . . ."
And the other brother leaned and murmured:
"I put my strength in a life,
And in that life my love,
This, with my love, I give to America."

Lilacs bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

Then my heart sang out: This strength shall be our strength:
Yea, when the great hour comes, and the sleepers wake and
are hurled back,
And creep down into themselves
There they shall find Walt Whitman
And there, Abraham Lincoln.

O Spring, go over this land with much singing
And open the lilacs everywhere,
Open them out with the old-time fragrance
Making a people remember that something has been forgotten,
Something is hidden deep—strange memories—strange memo-
ries—
Of him that brought a sprig of the purple cluster
To him that was mourned of all . . .

And so they are linked together
While yet America lives . . .

While yet America lives, my heart,
Lilacs shall bloom for Walt Whitman
And lilacs for Abraham Lincoln.

MY LAND

NOT for long can I be angry with the most beautiful—
I look out of my vengefulness, and see her so young, so vastly young,
Wandering her fields beside Huron,
Or peering over Mt. Rainier.

Is she in daisies up to her knees?
Do I see that fresh white smile of he-s in the morning-shadowed city?
Is this she clinging to the headlight of the locomotive that roars between the pine-lone mountains?
Are her ankles in the wash of sea-weed beside the sea-battered rocks?

Ah! never the curve of a hill but she has just gone beyond it,
And the prairies are as sweet with her as with clover and sage. . . .
Her young breasts are soft against willow-leaves,
Her hands are quicker than birds in the vagueness of the forest.

Whether it is a dream that I have honey-gathered from the years of my days,
Whether it is so, and no dream,
I cannot help the love that goes out of me to these plains and hills,
These coasts, these cities, and these seas.

NIGHT

NIGHT

A Priest, A Poet, A Scientist.
Hilltop, in October; the stars shining.

[*The Priest kneels; the Scientist looks at the heavens through a telescope; the Poet writes in a little note-book.*]

THE PRIEST

WHEN I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained;
What is man, that Thou art mindful of him,
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?

THE SCIENTIST

Algol which is dim, becomes again a star of the second magnitude.

THE POET

My beloved is far from this hilltop, where the firs breathe heavily, and the needles fall;
But from the middle of the sea
She, too, gazes on the lustrous stars of calm October, and in her heart
She stands with me beneath these heavens—daintily blows
Breath of the sighing pines, and from the loaded and bowed-down orchards and from the fields
With smokes of the valley, peace steps up on this hill.

THE PRIEST

Thou art the Shepherd that strides down the Milky Way;
Thou art the Lord, our God: glorified be Thy name and Thy works.
I see Thee with Thy staff driving the star-sheep to the fold of dawn.

THE SCIENTIST

The Spiral Nebula in Ursa Major, that forever turns
Slowly like a flaming pin-wheel . . . thus are worlds born;
Thus was the sun and all the planets a handful of million years ago.

THE POET

She is far from me . . . but in the cradle of the sea
Sleepless she rocks, calling her beloved: he heeds her call:
On this hilltop he picks the North Star for his beacon . . .
For by that star the sailors steer, and beneath that star
She and I are one in the gaze of the heavens.

THE PRIEST

[*Slowly rising and turning to the others.*]

Let us glorify the Creator of this magnificence of infinite Night,
His footstool is the Earth, and we are but the sheep of this Shepherd.

THE SCIENTIST

Thus shall we only glorify ourselves,
That of this energy that rolls and drives in suns and planets
Are but the split-off forces with cunning brains,
And questioning consciousness . . . Pray, if you must—
Only your own ears hear you, and only the heart in your breast

Responds to the grandiose emotion . . . See yonder star?
That is the great Aldebaran, great in the night,
Needing a whole sky, as a vat and a reservoir, which he fills with his flame . . .
But no astronomer with his eye to his lenses
Has seen ears on the monster.

THE PRIEST

Thou that hast never seen an atom, nor the ether thou pratest of,
Thou that hast never seen the consciousness of man,
What knowest thou of the invisible arms about this sky,
And the Father that leans above us?

THE POET

We need know nothing of any Father
When the grasses themselves, withering in October, stand up and sing their own dirges in the great west wind,
And every pine is like a winter lodging-house where the needles may remember the greenness of the world,
And the great shadow is jagged at its top with stars,
And the heart of man is as a wanderer looking for the light in a window,
And the kiss and warm joy of his beloved.

THE PRIEST

Man of Song and Man of Science,
Truly you are as people on the outside of a house,
And one of you only sees that it is made of stone, and its windows of glass, and that fire burns on the hearth,
And the other of you sees that the house is beautiful and very human,
But I have gone inside the house,

And I live with the host in that house
And have broken bread with him, and drunk his wine,
And seen the transfiguration that love and awe make in the brain . . .
For that house is the world, and the Lord is my host and my father:
It is my father's house.

THE SCIENTIST

He that has gone mad and insane may call himself a king,
And behold himself in a king's palace, with feasting, and dancing women, and with captains,
And none can convince him that he is mad,
Slave of hallucination . . .
We that weigh the atom and weigh a world in the night, and we
Who probe down into the brain, and see how desire discolors reality,
And we that see how chemical energy changes and transforms the molecule,
So that one thing and another changes and so man arises—
With neither microscope, nor telescope, nor spectroscope, nor finest violet ray
Have we found any Father lurking in the intricate unreasonable drive of things
And the strange chances of nature.

THE POET

O Priest, is it not enough that the world and a Woman are very beautiful,
And that the works and tragic lives of men are terribly glorious?
There is a dance of miracles, of miracles holding hands in

a chain around the Earth and out through space to the moon, and to the stars, and beyond the stars,
And to behold this dance is enough;
So much laughter, and secret looking, and glimpses of wonder, and dreams of terror . . .
It is enough! it is enough!

THE PRIEST

Enough? I see what is enough!
Machinery is enough for a Scientist,
And Beauty is enough for a Poet;
But in the hearts of men and women, and in the thirsty hearts of little children
There is a hunger, and there is an unappeasable longing,
For a Father and for the love of a Father . . .
For the root of a soul is mystery,
And the Night is mystery,
And in that mystery men would open inward into Eternity,
And know love, the Lord.
Blessed be his works, and his angels, and his sons crowned with his glory!

[*A pause. The Woman with a burden in her arms comes in slowly.*]

THE WOMAN

Who has the secret of life among you?

THE PRIEST

I, woman, have that secret:
I have learned it from the book of the revelations of God,
And I have learned it from life, bitterly,
And from my heart, holily.

THE SCIENTIST

Be not deceived, woman:
There is only one book of reality—the book of Nature.

THE WOMAN

Who has read in that book?

THE SCIENTIST

I have read a little:
No man has read much.

THE POET

They lead you nowhere, woman;
You are the secret of life, and your glory is in seeking the secret,
But finding it never.

THE WOMAN

I have climbed this hill and found three watchers of the night—
Three star-gazers perched above the placid October harvests
Where they lie golden and crimson along the valley, and high on the slopes
The scarlet maples flame—
You are a priest: and you speak of God.
I am nothing but need: for I carry a burden that is heavier than the Earth, and is heavier
Than the flesh of woman can bear: I break
Down under it: and a hard hate
Against my birth is steel in my heart—I curse
God, if there be a God—
Love, if ever there was love—

Life, that is empty ravings,
And the hour when I was born.

THE PRIEST

Peace! Peace! Thou standest in the presence of the Night
Shadowy with grace and benediction—the mercy
Of the Lord falls like the dew on the soft brow of thy affliction!

THE POET

[*Softly*]
She is very beautiful and dark with her stern cursing,
Standing there like an enemy of great Jehovah,
A demon-woman satanic—she is very beautiful,
With her arms full of her burden, and the stars
Seeming to retreat before her.

THE SCIENTIST

What burden is that you carry?

THE WOMAN

That which is worth nothing,
And worth more than these stars you gaze at.

THE PRIEST

Put thy burden upon the Lord, and thy trust in His loving kindness.

THE WOMAN

I will not part with my burden, though it is worth nothing . . .

For what are a few pounds of dead flesh worth when the life has left it?

THE PRIEST

Then you carry the dead at your breast?

THE WOMAN

I carry the dead . . .

THE PRIEST

Flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone . . .

THE WOMAN

My breasts are still heavy with unsucked milk . . .

THE PRIEST

Your child has died . . .

THE WOMAN

My baby is dead . . .

THE PRIEST

The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

THE WOMAN

Nine long months
I ripened with the human seed, and like a goodly tree that is green
Stooped with sheltering boughs above the swelling fruit . . .

Song rang sweetly in my blood . . .
I tasted the silent life as a spring hillside where the furrows are run
So holds its bated breath against the pressing of the grass-blades
That birds coming that way catch the held-down glory under the furrows
And scatter ecstatic golden notes in the morning light . . .
Until the trumpets blasted, as if the opening heavens of a sunrise
Were battalions of bright trumpeters blowing news of dawn . . .
Sank I then into darkness,
Sank I then into terror,
Till I was healed of pain by the new-born, my child . . .
And now, behold in my arms
The life of my life:
All that I was went out in him: my life was now outside me.

THE PRIEST

Unto thee a son was born!

THE WOMAN

I ran to tend him with glad feet, and with laughter . . .
For my life was now outside of me,
And I was seeking my life.

THE PRIEST

You praised the Lord?

THE WOMAN

I loved my child . . .

THE PRIEST

And God forgotten?

THE WOMAN

That child was holy . . .

THE PRIEST

He was but flesh . . .

THE WOMAN

Just so was Christ . . .

THE PRIEST

A Son of God . . .

THE WOMAN

My child was such . . .

THE PRIEST

So in the corrupt new generations of men
They forget God, and love but the flesh,
And the corruptible flesh decays after its kind
And in their bereavement they have nothing . . . then in their sorrow
They curse the true and the good.

THE WOMAN

The flesh, you say? Here is the flesh:
But was it the flesh when his blue eyes opened and gazed with great hunger,

Was it the flesh that wailed, the flesh that warmed against my naked breasts, the flesh
That went a secret way, and I after, I after, seeking through embraces
To catch my son back, hold him. . . . But, oh, he was gone,
He was gone, leaving *this*. Priest, is this all you have for the bereaved?

THE PRIEST

That which is gone is now with God.

THE WOMAN

I was his God, for to me the beautiful bright life raised its hands,
Suppliant, full of faith . . .
He wailed for enfolding love: I gave it
For daily bread: I gave it
For healing and shelter: I gave it.
Out of me he came, but away from me he has gone,
And if he has found out some other mother, I curse her in my jealousy!

THE PRIEST

So you blaspheme the holiness of the Omnipotent!

THE WOMAN

So I curse the thief who stole my treasure away.

THE PRIEST

Alas! Who may speak to a sacrilegious generation?

THE WOMAN

Speak if you can, and tell me in a few words

What is the secret of life?

THE PRIEST

Life is a mysterious preparation for immortality . . .
We are sons and daughters of God, who shall later be angels, and in Heaven
Know bliss beyond all dream.

THE WOMAN

[*Uncovering her child's face.*]
My son . . .
You and I lately pulsed with one pulse, and sang together one song:
For you the flaming pain, for you the terror of birth . . .
And this priest's God let you suffer, in a glorious preparation,
And let you die . . .
[*Kisses him.*]
Cold! Cold! My heart tightens hard, my blood is chilled . . .
[*In a loud cry.*]
Hellish heaven! Devilish God!
[*Silence. The Poet advances and covers the face.*]

THE POET

You are very wonderful and very noble in your satanic anger,
Your curses are cleansing, for it is a mighty thing for man to confront creation
Greater even than this vast Night, to stand in his transiency
And his pitiful helplessness, and in the grasp of his doom, and against death,
Darkness, and mysterious powers, alone of all life
Godlike, downing the universe with defiance! O godlike
Are you; and you *are* God!

THE WOMAN

[*Gazing at him.*]
Who are you, with these words?

THE POET

Seer and singer, one who glories in life, and through vision
Creates his own worlds.

THE WOMAN

Has your mother ever wept for you?

THE POET

All mothers weep . . .

THE WOMAN

Have you ever had a child?

THE POET

No child of my own: but I know the love of children.

THE WOMAN

Can I trust you with a great trust?

THE POET

I think of you as a holy thing.

THE WOMAN

Then—take this a moment,
And feel how light a heavy burden may be.
[*She carefully places the child in his arms.*]

THE POET

How strangely light!

THE WOMAN

You tremble. Why?

THE POET

There is something so real in the stiff posture of these tiny legs,
These crooked arms, this little body,
This hanging head . . .

THE WOMAN

Can you see him?

THE POET

[*Looking close.*]
O tiniest budding mouth,
O dark deep fringes of eyelids,
O pallid cheeks . . .

THE WOMAN

And the little tuft of hair—you see it?

THE POET

Take him! My heart is in despair!

THE WOMAN

No one will have my burden; for my burden is heavier
Than any save a mother can bear . . . O Earth, hard Earth,

I shall not go mad: I hold back: I shut the doors on the Furies:
I stand straight and stiff! I hold against my heart with words!
[*Silence.*]
So, poet, you are hushed! Life is too much for you!
Go—live in your dreams and let the reality of experience
Flow over you, untasted . . . You are wise: it is better!
[*Silence.*]
What? All silent? My star-gazers brought to a pause?
You, too?

THE SCIENTIST

[*Grimly.*]
Who would listen to me must be hard and strong.

THE WOMAN

Am I soft and weak?

THE SCIENTIST

You have the strength of revolt, but not the greater strength of acceptance.

THE WOMAN

What shall I accept?

THE SCIENTIST

The inexorable facts of life.

THE WOMAN

And what are those facts?

THE SCIENTIST

That man is no more than the grasses, and that man is no more,
Though his dreams are grandiose, than the pine on this hill, or the bright star
Burning blue out yonder—strangely the chemicals mix, and the forces interplay,
And out of it consciousness rises, an energy harnessed by energies,
And a little while it burns, then flickers, then vanishes out,
And is no more than the October wind and the smell of dried hay.

THE WOMAN

These are the facts?

THE SCIENTIST

These are the facts.

THE WOMAN

And my child was nothing but energy, gathered and scattered?

THE SCIENTIST

These are the facts . . .

THE WOMAN

He was only a cunning engine and a curious machine?

THE SCIENTIST

Thus are we all . . .

THE WOMAN

Not all . . . thus are *you* . . .
But this child was mine, he was my baby and my son.
And I was his life-giver, and his lover, and his mother . . .
And I knew the glory of this child, for I lived with it,
And I know the marvel and mystery of motherhood, for I lived it . . .
I lived it, who now live the death of a treasured being,
And who know now that the light of the world is out, and only death
May heal me of anguish, and only death's long sleep
Shall bury my bereavement in peace . . . O mouthers of words,
Dreamers who do not live, I go back to the valley,
And there I shall put this babe in the Earth where the seeds of Autumn are sinking,
And there I shall slay myself, knowing that no one knows,
And no one helps, and life is a madness and a horror,
And to be dead is better than to suffer.

[*They say nothing. The Priest silently prays. The Woman turns, and starts slowly out. But as she goes a Man enters, searchingly.*]

THE MAN

Beloved! O where have you fled from me?

THE WOMAN

Go back—I hate you for bringing this being into life,
Whose loss has ruined life, life itself: and I had better never loved you,
For love brings children to the mother.

THE MAN

It is my child, too . . . I too have lost him.

THE WOMAN

You have lost a plaything and the promise of a man,
And you have lost a trouble and a burden:
But I have lost my love, and I have lost the life of my life.

THE MAN

You are cruel in your sorrow beyond all women . . .

THE WOMAN

Then leave me, and seek comfort elsewhere.
There are many women.

THE MAN

You are desperate, and there is a hardness in you that makes me afraid.
Where are you going?

THE WOMAN

I follow this child.

THE MAN

Then I lose *my* child . . . even as you lost yours.

THE WOMAN

Your child? Ha! I am gone!
[*Tries to pass him; he seizes her.*]

THE MAN

You shall not go, for you are mine. O beloved, hear me!

THE WOMAN

Take away your hands, for every moment that you make me stay
Deepens my hate of you.

THE MAN

You would break my life in bits?

THE WOMAN

Your life is not so easily broken . . .
You are a man . . . Come! I shall do some terrible thing—

THE MAN

Then I too shall follow . . .

THE WOMAN

Follow? Where?

THE MAN

Wherever you go.

THE WOMAN

Down into death?

THE MAN

Even unto death.
[*A pause; she draws back a little.*]

THE WOMAN

Are you crying? Are there tears on your cheeks?

Why do you heave so?

THE MAN

Your love has died . . .

THE WOMAN

Are you so weak?

THE MAN

But I need you so . . .

THE WOMAN

[*In a changed voice.*]
You need me!

THE MAN

Look, if I do not need you, who am alone, uncomforted,
With no place on Earth, no life, no light, if you are gone . . .

THE WOMAN

You need me?

THE MAN

I need you . . .
[*Silence.*]

THE WOMAN

This man is my child . . .
[*Silence.*]

THE MAN

[*Drawing her tenderly close.*]
Our dead child between us,
O my beloved, is there not a future?
May no more children issue from us, no more children
Lovely, golden, waking with laughter, and clothed as with dawn
With the memory of the dead? Come, my beloved,
Down to the Valley, down to the living, down to the toilers.
Come, my beloved! I am your child and your father,
Your husband and your lover! Come, let us go!

THE WOMAN

[*Weeping.*]
O my heart!
Something has broken in me, and the flood flows through my being!
I come! I come!

[*They go out together, the Man with his arm around the Woman.*]

THE PRIEST

Forgive these children, Lord God!

THE SCIENTIST

Ignorance is indeed bliss!

THE POET

The secret of life?
He gives it to her, she gives it to him . . .
But who shall tell of it? Who shall know it?

VII

INTERLUDE

THE MYSTIC WARRIOR (Continued)

At 37–8

What shall I say of the great years in-between?
Ah, little, little . . .
Once I thought one could tell all . . .
One cannot tell all: and the last word lies buried,
As in everyone it lies buried.

All I can say is that I went a perilous path,
For he who would overcome himself must break with much
that is called goodness,
And much that is named great,
Since evil is ore, too, that needs to be smelted,
And good is evil in the transcending.

Read between the lines: the songs speak:
In the climbing of the mountain there is a God-path and a
Devil-path,
And both must be covered, inch by inch, if we would go up.

Beyond Golden Bird, Stanner: a parable . . .
And the meaning waits for time to make it plain. . . .

VIII

GOLDEN BIRD

PART ONE
GOLDEN BIRD

I

NAUSICAA

IS it on a coast of my soul
That galleons out of Greece are beaching the beautiful gods
And Nausicaa is willowy on the seashore?

Why do you gaze seaward, sister draped in drifting blue?
Is the Wanderer gone, sailing the seas for home?
Your Wanderer, is he gone?

The white wave curls singing on the shore among the pebbles,
The white nymphs dance and sing: something about dark Helen,
Something about dark Helen . . .

Spell of Apollo brightens and burns my spirit . . .
O my soul, opening in the sunrise that is Greece,
Gone home singing to the star of beauty,
Where flesh is touched with the immortal wonder of calm divinities,
And Aphrodite is in the salt wave, shining, breaking . . .
Breaking, shining . . .

Why do you gaze seaward, sister wound in wavy blue?
Am I the Wanderer, and did we kiss last night in firelight among the pillars,
And did I steal away in the morning, sailing the seas for home?

I call you: 'Nausicaa' . . .

I call and call you in the sunrise: 'Nausicaa' . . .
The sea's blue is in my eyes,
And in my ears the song of the white nymphs: something about dark Helen,
Something about dark Helen . . .

Is it a galleon out of Greece that bears me to the land of Zion
And the dark rose of Sharon?
Have I left the beautiful sister in the sunrise to go home to the ancient Mother sitting in the lap of Night
Weeping among the willows where Babylon mocks her
And she remembers Zion?

She sits by the waters of rivers, my dark great Mother,
Calling the exiles home to her heart:
Mystery is her name, and Night, and terrible Jehovah:
She carries the storm of man, struggling with lightnings and thunders to the heights of glory . . .
Sunrise of Greece is a watery shaft in her whirling abyss . . .

And the Wanderer drifts in the middle of the seas, his oars idle, his sails furled,
Becalmed between sunrise and night, between Greece and Zion,
And he calls: 'Nausicaa,'
He calls and calls toward the sunrise: 'Nausicaa'
While the dark great Mother weeps in the core of his heart.

II

COMET

YOU have come on me like a head streaming fire in the November blackness,
Comet of madness and miracle,
Out of the Deeps, the Deeps beyond the stars . . .

They knew you, O dancer with the flaming scarf,
Spangling Assyrian midnight . . . cymbals clashed, anklets tinkled . . .
You burned with beauty into the souls of men . . .

The Nile knew you as you walked in the courts of your massive home,
O slender and large-eyed maiden,
A tiger at your right hand, and a leopard at your left . . .

In the houses of the prostitutes you sat in the dusk, listening to camel-bells,—
Dark Arabs came to devour your young body . . .

Were you not the prone Magdalen at the feet of Jesus,
And when you passed into healing was Jesus not you,
And you the clear-eyed Christ?

Maid of Orleans, I see you sitting your black charger,
In shining armour and pure of face . . .

Maid of Verona, I see you leaning to your lover in the moon-knifed shadows . . .
Your long hair falls shining down your breasts and he climbs to press his lips to the shining . . .

What garden have I seen you running in, a slip of a girl,
Shouting at play, and tossing plums at your fleeing brother?

Among the maskers, you leap and dance and you sing,
O light-footed!

And now you are tiger-woman, come to devour the souls of men . . .
And now you curl weeping at your lover's feet, wrenched through all your loveliness with despairing desire . . .

O baleful one, O beautiful, what are you, coming upon me like a head streaming fire?
Comet, what are you?

Is it my soul, dripping monstrous and miraculous dut of the depths?
Is it thus souls are born?

III

WILD-ROSE

O THE wild rose!
Star of the pastures, sea-girl, sun-child,
Rose of the rocks!

Blue seas break in my heart and sun-waters drench the shores of my spirit . . .
You are gone, Great Mother of the Stars, Universe-Mother, you are gone . . .
The world is my sea-eyed Sister with the pale pink-petal'd cheeks . . .
Sea and headland and wind-lit woods are the beautiful maiden . . .
Wild-rose World, world of the sun-magic, world of the maddening body . . .

Wild-Rose, beloved, I am snared, I am taken in a net . . .
When was I not the slave of beauty,
When did I not fall down when the eyes of beauty transfixed me?

On coasts of moonlight the billows of the stars break into faint sparkles,
Night echoes the delicate star-boom from far lunar shores . . .
In the desert the tom-toms roll like the dust: death-peril glows: death grows sweet:

The young white dancer glides with her serpent: she is naked
in her glory . . .
And in my soul is the perfume of cool lilies-of-the-valley,
And in my soul the wild-rose opens, tear'd with dew . . .

Whence have you come in the darkness to be bound throbbing
and taut in my arms
Naked new young body hewed from the warm granite of God?
Whence is this passion and madness, breath of the Assyrian
desert,
African breath, tigress of night?

Wild-Rose, belovèd,
Wild-Rose twined with the deadly night-shade,
Wild-Rose where the cobra lurks.

IV

GOLDEN BIRD

YOU are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
Nor as the women whose darkness like a cloud enwombs the future . . .
No, you are not the mystery through which the children toil down from the Eternal,
Nor Earth of the mellow udders for the lips of babes . . .

Flesh goes through flesh in that procession which like the sun shines between two darknesses,
But where is your mortal mother, O Bird, O Golden, Golden Bird?
Rather your mother was the deep still pool where only the forest sings cradle-song, sings lullaby,
And where from mute waters you opened and spread the purity of your whiteness and your greenness
Over black passionate roots, Water-Lily, my Water-Lily.

In a strange way, from a strange place, sombre and eternal,
You came, dropped like moon-gold among the deep leaves,
Till the Cities of the Many Flesh found you with lifted face among the faces,
And the women turned to look at the slender stem upbearing the pure passion of that gazing glory,
Whose long hair robbed the moon,
Whose eyes had stolen from the sea . .

Eternal Maiden among the mothers,
You are younger and older than the new babe and the ancient wisdoms,
Young as the lily petals white on the blue waters,
Old as the black roots fastened in Chaos . . .
Wild-rose, spirit of play, whimsy of the grey stones and the yellow mullein,
Sea-beaming sun-ray dancing among the pines,
Child that can never age so long as April keeps on returning,
Dark monstrous invisible glory behind the laughter and sparkle of your dalliance,
Goddess as deep as Demeter in the wild-rose raiment . . .

You are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
No, nor as the mothers, the mothers of the Earth,
But you have come down to be Golden Bird leading rapt men into vision and victory,
Gathering them in, like a ghostly immaculate virgin, to a womb of the spirit
Wherefrom, reborn, they come with immortal youth.

She of Orleans was your sister in the shining of the days of the holy cathedrals,
She that led the dark poet up spirals of the skies through Paradise, was your sister,
She that drew the great soul of Faust upward and onward into heaven, was your sister,
Eternal Maiden, immortal Wild-Rose, everlasting Lily . . .

I have seen you touch with faint intoxication of the Drink of the Gods, pale weighted spirits,
I have seen you splendid as one in armour leading the hosts of the young to high invisible battles,

I have felt the hurricane in you, blasting the dead ways open
in the shatter of old cities,
I have tasted your storm, O Maiden, I have blown in your
rains,
I have crept into the chaos of your heart and drunk from the
black roots of rhapsodic song,
Till I came forth, arrayed in wonder . . .

You are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
You are not as the mothers, the mothers of the Earth . . .
You are Golden Bird, Golden Bird darting into the heavens
and singing as you go,
And I follow, I follow, my eyes forever lifted.

V

LILY-OF-THE-VALLEY

LILY-OF-THE-VALLEY
You have made some old moon-city fragrant, fragrant,
Till her still streets call with elusive perfume,
And her shadows twist, sanded golden through whimpering oleanders,
And one great echo of heaven breaks in silver splinters in the dreams of the sleepers of the city . . .

Now is the hour of the great desertion: refugee hour of lily-bright dreams . . .
The sea of the streets of the sun-city
Empties through windows and prison-bars of the moon-city . . .
Down empty pavements nothing is afoot save crime and love . . .

I am afoot, O window-gazer above the dreams and ghosts of the walled garden . . .
Silence from the encircling Shadow closes in upon my heels and is struck back, blow by blow.
Blow by blow my heart breaks silence, leaping toward your awaiting arms . . .

This is the wall: here grow your ramblers, and here your honeysuckle, and the night-greyed violets . . .

Clambering over, I have given my loaf to buy your hyacinths
for my soul . . .
"Muguet" I call, my feet in the dew, my hands on the
wistaria . . .

Lily-of-the-valley
You and the moon lean down,
And now this night moves by magic into that Night of the
Ages,
The Night of All-Lovers,
And the eternal summer of those moons which have kissed the
kisses of passionate young souls
Is ours . . .

Dreams and ghosts are crying a soundless song from the dead
centuries of loves stronger than death,
The Ages go laughing and weeping up and down the empty
streets,
And the Earth, a rich dust of lovers, opens and is the rose
that enfolds us in her heart forever . . .

We die into the rose . . .
Rose-flushed, the city hears song through its dream . . .
Impassioned, the white of the lily is the crimson of the rose . . .

Clattering silver, the moonlight's a glamour-dance.

VI

BEAUTIFUL

NOW Golden Bird,
Sleepless for warbling,
Sits in the warm dark beneath my eyelids.

Golden Bird, Golden Bird, my soul,
When you were a maiden in the evening in the starlight,
And I brushed your lips with adoring,
The dark was like light about us,
Like gliding shuttles of golden light . . .

What could I do, Beautiful,
But take you deep in the folds of my ghost
Where you sang all night long?

O Golden Bird,
Sleepless for warbling,
You are sitting behind shut eyes in the warm dark.

VII

MUSIC

AND when I heard that voice
Which seemed like the ghost of a wisp of bemooned vapour,
Like the echo of the starlight,
Like twined laughter and yearning descending through a phantom of sorrow,
And which was love in pain before a god and a child in the belovèd's soul,
Then there was no other music for me, no, none other,
And my soul, shut from her soul, forever, forever,
Must hunt forever the mystery where that music hides . . .

And when that song, like the drip of honey in a dream,
Is mine in a quick moment of shaken chance,
And I take the pang of it, and die toward her spirit, beating on the gates that are locked and sealed,
Then it ceases from the air, leaving the ache of silence,
And *eternal* desire . . .

VIII

MIRACLE

YOU are mine . . . you are mine . . . you are mine . . .
This is my fierce chant at night,
This is my savage cry.

Naked, you are mine,
And all in the sweet wonder of clothes, you are mine . . .
I take you with a rough tenderness: I own you:
I devour your beauty and your body and the wild lights of your star-soul . . .
You are woman, a man's morsel . . .

And you moan with delight to be enslaved, to be owned, to be devoured . . .
You pass into me, flame and incense of the ancient sacrifice,
You ascend in me, a wind of ashes and perfume for the nostrils of the god,
And out of death like shadow of fire your great ghost is reborn,
Your mother-ghost, where I sleepily lie, your child,
Very little, your child,
Your child at the breasts of love and life . . .

Then it is you who cry: "You are mine" . . .
Then it is you who devour . . .
Then it is I that ascend and am born . . .

So the spirits of man and woman pass through each other in the eternal renewal
Of love, the miracle, great love, the miracle.

IX

WONDER

LISTEN, dear Golden Bird . . .
When I was a tiny fellow, when I was nine years old,
Some wonder slipped from my spirit, and was lost, was lost . . .
But far-off on the Earth, O Golden Bird, you were born . . .

Long dark years were mine . . . dust of struggle and toil . . .
And I ran through the cities seeking, and looking at the beautiful faces . . .
Was this the wonder? was this? or was it a pine, a sea-wave,
Or was it a song, a star?

My music jangled in my throat, aching for the wonder,
The wonder of fairy-wing'd love, and the long blue-drifting golden-haired sea-girl,
Maiden eternal who brings a star up from the dark,
Wild morning-glory and evening-glow, O wonder, wonder, O wonder!

And at last, as I sang my 'Nevermore,'
Golden Bird, you came from the dark . . .
You came, and trouble was on me,
You came and I knew you not . . .
But Golden Bird, my Eve, knew the Adam from whence she sprang,
She knew it in a song of love . . .

Beating her futile wings against the bars of my jailed spirit,
She vanished in flight afar, and fell, and sickened, and almost
died . . .

But out of death, she came,
Yea, out of death, she came,
Out of her death and mine, and my heavens opened, and in a
long silence and slowness
I looked falteringly up, I looked and I slowly saw,
I saw and I knew . . . I knew and I found . . .
Found Golden Bird, found my soul,
O wonder, wonder, O wonder . . .

X

WINGÈD HEART

MY love is a wingèd heart . . .
O dark depths of my ghost whence, throbbing, she flies
Out and up to the heavens on the golden thread of my love . . .

My love is a wingèd heart . . .
And I draw in the golden thread, I draw it in quickly,
Lest she be flown, lest she be quite vanished . . .

My love is a wingèd heart . . .
Singing, she drops in my hands, and I put her warm in my breast . . .
Surely I should die if she never returned.

XI

SLUMBER-SONG FOR MY LOVE

ARE you in my arms, my bird,
Are you here? are you here, in the hollow beside my cheek?
Slender Pocahontas was your great-great-grandmother,
The pines and the waters soothed her into slumber,
Soothed her, caressed her, and murmured her asleep . . .

Let *me* be the pines and the waters,
And the dark, the summer Earth,
Let me be caressing South-Wind
Starry and melodious . . .
Let me gather you, let me be your enfolding into a nest,
Let me be the waters where you slip to the dark and cease,
Cease from care and trouble, darling, and come to rest,
And come to rest . . .

Mystery, the moon-browed Mother, calls you in my spirit,
Calls you and you come . . .
Enter the dark and abide there until the dark grows light,
Until the dark grows lambent and melting golden about you,
And you lie in the garden where the night-birds sing,
And the great dream comes down,
And the great dream comes down . . .

Hush . . . and soothe . . . be quiet . . .
Cling close, content, content . . .

My love is warm about you . . .
Go drowsy, drift down drowsy on the bosom of the stream of
Silence,
Silence, the full-brimmed river that moves to the shadow of the
Sea,
Sea of slumber, of sleep . . .
Sleep . . . sleep . . .

XII

SECOND SLUMBER-SONG

FORGET yourself into a child,
And let me be the cradling arms
Of far away and long ago . . .
Lay away trouble and pain, lay them away,
Lay them on me, my own,
And give your soul into mine.

Come from many troubles into peace,
Come from tired travel into rest . . .
Float away on the waters of melodious mothering silence,
Down to the sea of sleep,
Down to the Deep of Dreams.

XIII

LOVE'S PROOF

THIS is love's proof:
That it is more wonderful to be together, than to be parted:
That distance does not touch each other with a glamour
Half so beautiful as the witchery of nearness:
That the hours together go all too soon, too soon:
That morning trips on the heels of evening, and the dark is juggled with the light:
That we never have time enough to say all the things that we must say:
That parting makes us aware of hunger and desire:
That the thousandth touch of lips has the fine intoxication of the first:
That we could watch each other forever in increasing astonishment of wide-eyed wonder:
That a faint music enspheres us and is never silent:
That we seem to dwell in the timeless and the world is an interruption:
That each seems so beyond the other, burning like a star of mystery,
The approach toward the other is toward something elusive and receding,
Something ever higher and further, remote, unattainable,
Needing a lifetime of seeking.

XIV

MADNESS

COME, let us take our breakfast in the city where the people dwell in darkness,
Let the brook-babble of a continuous musical laughter be soft between us,
Let us veil our eyes from each other and guard our lips,,
Let us seem sane and practical in the wild morning-weather,
Let not the heaven of glory within us be manifest before the people,
Let them not see the sky where we soar together . . .
Lest we be taken, lest we be confined, lest we be put away,
Lest we be arrested for lunacy . . .

XV

DAYBREAK

FLING your lasso of light curling about our heads,
Morning-fire,
Smite with your spears of gold the pulse of our hearts,
Strike sun-up song from our souls, that arising with kisses
We become the crown of life,
A young garland of the Earth.

XVI

SUNWARD

MY beloved is the prow of my spirit plunging through the billowing blue of the morning,
There is a sea-song in our on-going, and a wind-song in our sails:
Our sails are glittering wings, our ship is a bird rising from the running seas,
We have a sky, we have a sky for soaring and singing.
Earth sparkles beneath us in September glory,
And near the sun we pour our golden love-song upon the planet . .

XVII

THE GOLDEN LOVE-SONG

LET now my soul
Ascend with the song of glorious love to the skies of the morning,
Let now my lark-soul, sun of the darkness, dawn toward the sun of the day,
Earth is too narrow: give me a sky to sing in:
Give me a sky for a golden love-song . . .

I arose from the bed of night and from the arms of my belovèd in the darkness:
I arose: I tasted resurrection:
The god, struggling in my breast, became a lark . . .
'This is what the Earth means,' I cried,
'Why our planet goes with singing down the sky-road of the stars.'

Then my young love leaped radiant to the kiss of the morning-shine,
She sparkled out of the waters of the bath; laughter of brooks was she,
Babble of pines was she . . .
She came with long hair of the seaweed colour running to wild tints of the russet-and-golden rocks,
Starred with her sea-blue eyes, sunned with her wild-rose cheeks . . .

My love was a young victory and our souls went singing
together into the skies . . .
Lark-golden, lark-singing, into the morning skies . . .

You are beautiful, you are beautiful, my wild-rose love . . .
O my lark-soul, you are beautiful . . .
If I were a stone this morning, I should break into song,
If I were a massive mountain, I should snap my rock-
foundations and dance upon the plains,
If I were a fixed star, I should leap a mad comet of music . . .

You are beautiful, you are beautiful, my wild-rose love . . .
Golden with the South are you,
Passionate with the South . . .
You strike through my dark North soul the wine-rays of
delight . . .
You permeate me with a rhapsody of perfume and of bobolink-
tunes and of petal-tints . . .
You smite me open singing into resurrection . . .
You have conquered me: I am in love . . .

In love: and I am wings now:
In love: and I am a song now . . .
I am a golden love-song which can never be blown into the
magic of the throat's singing,
Which can only die into your heart, my beautiful,
Which can only sing into your soul, and yours alone, yours
alone . . .
Yours alone in all the world.

XVIII

STAR OF MAIDENS

IF like your kinswoman of old,
If like that star of maidens, Pocahontas,
You found me, O my beloved, near to death,
Found me with my head laid on the stones, and the brute war-clubs raised above me,
Then, Golden Bird, I know that, never faltering, never trembling
You, too, O Star of Maidens,
Would take my head into your arms and lay your lovely head on mine,
And save me from great death in the dark moment.

XIX

DIVINE CHILD

O MIRACLE of love—
I came clamorously conquering . . .
I conquered the God for love of whom I went a weakling,
For love of whom I crawled and crept,
Whose shelter and strong protection I craved . . .

Mighty monster, I conquered him. . . .

Lo, then, he appeared before me as a maiden,
Yea, as a Divine Child . . .

And now at last, I surrendered to love . . .
I stooped down and knelt: I cried, 'My soul, lead me, I follow' . . .
I cried: 'I that am above thee, thy conqueror, willingly become thy slave' . . .

And I saw then how my Soul looked into the heart of the intolerable light of heaven,
And I looked in her eyes and saw glory by reflection.

XX

RESURRECTION

LIKE a golden storm
That has blown me bodily through eternal days
Love came, song-circled and star-windy . . .

But now?
I stand in the clear hard afternoon, and I am one
Remembering madness . . . searching the west for the gone glory . . .

Where am I now, alone?
And where is Golden Bird?
And where the abyss of vision, and the plighting, and immortal promises?
Where are those moments when death seemed conquered
And we dreamed our love everlasting?

O love, O love,
Is this all that thou art?
A lightning-opening of heavens, music flashed through the night, a cry, a sigh—nothing more?

I call you 'Golden Bird!'
I call and call you through the still afternoon: 'Golden Bird!
Wing back from the sky's shining and rain your melodious madness on my parched spirit,
Make me insane again with lunatic love . . .'

O there is no joy in life, but to be mad . . .
To be beauty's slave, till the streets are a silver smoke whisked
down echoing alleys of chaos,
And we are angel and demon puffing on golden trumpets
among the dancing towers,
And the sea is a wash of gods, billowing shouts of immor-
tals . . .

When I was bewitched with the long wonder of your careless
hair,
When I laughed and wept like a waterfall among the thunder-
ing mountains,
When I knelt like a lost soul in the pit before my star in the
two-wing'd night,
When wizardry of a kiss brought hot flash of a reborn seraph,
Then I lived, then, drunken and divine, I shared with gods
Creation's infinite golden energy,
Creation's careless fling and scatter of scarf'd stars in mighty
night . . .

Magic of song!
Already the stupor and glory mount and sing in my blood,
And I think tonight
We shall eternize love,
Immortalizing the perishing . . .

XXI

BREATH OF THE DEEP

HOW wonderful is love,
And how wonderful, how wonderful,
How wonderful is the belov'd . . .

O my heart, melt in my body in that miracle by which blood turns into wine,
And the wine of passion becomes a music,
And the music *is* love . . .

Let me be an instrument, let me be a stringed instrument, a violin,
And let the god breathe on it, breath of the deeps, breath of those windy stars that dance with immortal feet where all is light,
That the song of my body enter the belov'd with divine pulsations . . .

XXII

STAR-DANCE

I HAVE been felled by beauty . . .
O the amazed wonder of my soul . . .
The wild-rose wonder, and wine-wonder, and moon-wonder . . .

I have been snared by a white body with pointed breasts and the curves that only water and song can echo . . .

The golden manacles of love on my wrists and ankles have given me freedom . . .

Fire-dance of wonder! Star-dance of joy!
Such is my beloved, such is my love . . .

XXIII

INDIAN SUMMER

AGAIN great song
Bubbles her stars in the pebbly spring of my spirit . . .
And I am on my knees in praise
Because love, quick love, is leaping again
Like a babe, like a bird, like a brook . . .

The time of Indian Summer is here,
The hazy sun and the mellow air,
Yellow leaves that drink of the golden,
Drink of the glow of the dream-gold city . . .

For the city is a dream
That Golden Bird and I are dreaming . . .
We babble new songs in secret as we pass among the people . . .
We laugh a secret laughter in the drifting Indian Summer . . .
We are music-mad; we are lovers . . .

We walk in a sky-earth song . . .
O song that comes from a great distance,
Peoples unborn,
And dreams to be lived.

XXIV

IN AN OLD SQUARE

IN an old square, in an old city square
Autumn is passing through us,
And we are in love . . .

We are in love's deep passion, and sighing, we dream
The moon up, and the stars out, and the tree-tops into song.
We dream a city into being beyond the iron gratings,
An ancient moon-lamp'd city, maybe in Asia,
Where lovers kissed and Solomon sang . . .

We dream the mighty top of the tower piercing golden into the heaven
Where a pebble falls in that pool of sky
And circles of silver bell-ripples widen and run
Dropping a silver chime . . .

We dream our souls into each other
Under an oaken magic, by a low willow,
And leaves falling, and leaves falling . . .

And I say, 'Golden Bird,
In my arms you elude me, you escape and are gone, a spirit, a cloud, a star . . .'

And I say, 'Star of Maidens,
Your face is deathless among all mortal faces . . .'

And I say, whispering, with my arms binding you to my heart:
'You are all the women I have ever loved in one,
You are all the women men have ever loved in one,
Yet, miracle of miracles, you are you . . .'

XXV

THE DANCE-SONG

DANCE, my words!
Dance on my lips! dance in the air!
Dance, and make a dance-song, a dance-song for Golden Bird!

Golden Bird's a goose-girl, a pixy, an Ariel,
Golden Bird's a princess: she stepped right out of a fairy tale . . .
Golden Bird's the wood-cutter's daughter, asleep on maple leaves . . .

She walks in the woodlands dreaming: she is petals drifting: she is water flashing . . .
She is young Pocahontas, lithe Minnehaha . . .
She is very lovely, she is very lovely . . .

Delicate wonder and gauzy gossamer, soaked with sun, alighting fairily,
Tripping along, a music of hands, a music of feet, a music of eyes . . .
Golden Bird is a sea-eyed dream that plays in my heart with sunbeam feet . . .

Spirit! she is a spirit!
O the spirit of beauty itself,
Wild beauty, the fool's beauty that snares the sea with nets of the sun,

Madman's beauty that lassoes the morning with loops on mountains and light on leaves . . .
Golden Bird's the golden ball of fire and love that makes this world
Beautiful, O beautiful,
Beautiful, O beautiful.

XXVI

THE ENEMY

WHEN that your beauty
Shines and is the opening of waters in the sunrise,
When that in my arms you begin to glow with a deathlessness
of glory,
My heart aches, my heart aches . . .

Death is my worst enemy: he is the black foe:
He is blind to the gazing of these beautiful eyes,
And deaf to the music of these lips,
He has no mercy for moon-gold hair,
And no pity for these delicate light hands . . .

Great must our passion be, to conquer him:
Great must our love be . . .
We must make the world blossom with the pure immortal
flame which is unalterable by darkness,
We must make Earth a song no storm may drown,
No wind may quiet . . .

XXVII

DEATH-SONG

AGAINST Death,
Warrior-girl, let us go, let us battle . . .
Against great Death, the foe, foe,
Let us wheel our battle-chariot wing'd with song's white horses
And charge the slants of the sky dashing against the dragon . . .

Veering we wheel, the blade of glory flashing,
And my young hair-streaming love is my charioteer in the heavens . . .
'Death unto Death,' she shouts, nerving me with unslayable daring . . .
Up against the monster we go, and a day and a night we battle . . .

Ho, we shall hack the horror
Till we topple the hairy spew to the wallow of hell,
Till the chant of our victory shivers into shatters the icicle stars crashing about us.

XXVIII

THE ATTEMPTED PORTRAIT

I PAINT your portrait:
I seize one of your beautiful moments:
I take you when you sit at the table before the mirror
And comb your hair and braid it and pin it up . . .

First it is all a rhapsody of colour,
Blue-and-rose silk, and green stockings, and black pumps,
And eyes of the sky-colour and hair of intermelting tints of tan and olive and chestnut running with gold,
And faint roses in the cheeks and along the lips,
But somehow all a drift of sea-blue and shell-pink,
Something of the wild rose,
Something not of night nor noon nor splendour of sunset,
But all of the sunrise . . .

Thus you are a vague intoxication: I must see you more sharply . . .

You are not tall, and yet you are so straight and so slender that you seem tall:
It seems first a boy's body, but it is eternally feminine with soft adorable beauty:
The gestures, the graceful and sure motions of hands and feet, the tilt and turn of the head.
The joy and sadness that startle each other across your face:

The delicate shadows and lights that fly and intermingle and pass and seem essentially you:
The exquisite perfumes, the art of your subtle clothes:
Your voice's music ranging from scarce-heard syllables of sighed delight
To clear treble of laughing narrative and defiant notes of assertion and anger:
The Southern accent, words that rise like the foot of a toe-dancer and come lightly down on the tip:
Your soft and fleeting touch, hands that caress like passing gossamer:
That something all about you that makes me think of a singing bird,
That makes me think always of England's lark.

I still miss you: you are too changeable:
I have seen you when you looked like an Elizabethan page,
And I have seen you when you were smart and dashing and would cut a figure galloping on a horse:
And I have seen you demure in veil and lace and scarf, like some antebellum maiden of the South . . .
And there are young moments, when you are the wide-eyed smiling child,
And old moments of haggard cheeks and thin drawn lips and miserable eyes . . .
And drugged moments, the trance of passion,
And brilliant moments, the flash of intellect . . .

No painter could paint you: he would have to use magic words as well as line and colour,
And fill a whole gallery with portraits,
And then set it all to music . . .
He could not see you, unless he loved you,
And if he loved you he would confront the unsearchable mysteries

And go dumb and maimed and blind . . .

No: I can only get glimpses of your soul; I see your soul
forever with the body a mere wavering of light and
shadow,
Cloud and mist and sparkle and changing colour . . .
See! I have quite lost you sitting there at the table, braiding
your hair . . .
Your body is only the language of your soul,
Its speech, its music, the way your soul has of speaking to
mine . . .

XXIX

BIRDS OF OUR JOY

BIRDS of our joy,
Irradiate, irradiate upward,
Upward opening like the fan of the sunrise till the sky is a burst
Of birds,
A storm of song . . .

Wing higher,
Wing and wheel,
Dew-scatterers,
Sparkle-flingers!

O heavy with the night of sorrow,
My white-faced, my pale love,
Gather your moon-remembering hair in a glory about your head,
And put on the shining of your silks,
And turn and find me: *my love, my love, I love you forever . . .*

I love you forever . . . hear our wild birds bursting the grey twilight with the song-sun:
Hear my heart beating its refluent passion against the softness of your breasts:
My lips kiss the tear-memories that haunt the shadows of your eyes:

Droop no more, garland of my love, I kneel before you,
I bury my face in your hands and my soul in your soul . . .

Sunrise mightily, splendidly, windily sweeps
Heaven clear of star-tears, earth clear of dew-tears . . .
Old Age is bundled away to blue-veiled Eternity . . .
Sorrow is dragged by the heels and flung in a canyon,
And somewhere our wet wild-rose is opening its petals on a grey rock
Where the sea booms and the foam flies and the golden oriole sings . . .

And I love you forever . . .
Bird of my joy and song-maker in the leafy boughs of my heart . . .
I love you: I love you: O what can I sing but this,
Clasping you in my arms, drinking the beauty of your lips,
While we glow out into the singing sunrise, while we glow out,
The immortal lovers, the deathlessly in love.

XXX

THE SINGER

GOLDEN Bird—
One of the mightiest of seraphs
Stood by my side in the dark hour.

And he said:
The path of air of the singing bird is not for a mortal . . .
On that path one is blown into stellar storms and nebulous cyclone . . .
One is not a man, but a voice,
Not a soul, but a music . . .

Take then the path of earth,
Of common things, of daily burdens, of human loves . . .
That is the path to immortality . . .
On that path man passes beyond the earth and beyond death
Into completion . . .

I heard the seraph . . .
I weighed the penalty . . .
And Golden Bird, I heard a note from your throat dropping in a crimson twilight,
And what was death then and mortality,
And what incompletion?

I come, Golden Bird,
And shall follow you till my eyes darken and my heart stops,
And nothing goes on of me but a deathless music.

XXXI

THE MAN

A DEATHLESS music . . .
Ah, Golden Bird,
In the morning I came to the sea and darkness was on it,
But the upper air was light . . . dawn breathed . . .

Out of the sea you rose until in the upper sky you shone,
O morning star . . .
And you sang, and the song came down . . .

"Follow," you sang,
"For I am mystery deeper than song,
As deep as life . . .
You never shall know what I mean, but following me
You shall know the path of air,
And know the path of Earth . . .
Both paths are one in my golden shining."

The song ceased:
And already I stood in the desert, and night was upon me,
On the way to the Muffled City.

PART TWO
HEBREWS

HEBREWS

(*To be chanted thunderously*)

I COME of a mighty race . . . I come of a very mighty race . . .
Adam was a mighty man, and Noah a captain of the moving waters,
Moses was a stern and splendid king, yea, so was Moses . . .
Give me more songs like David's to shake my throat to the pit of the belly,
And let me roll in the Isaiah thunder . . .

Ho! the mightiest of our young men was born under a star in the midwinter . . .
His name is written on the sun and it is frosted on the moon . . .
Earth breathes him like an eternal spring; he is a second sky over the Earth.

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh
Is a cup of song,
Is a well in Asia . . .
I go about with a dark heart where the Ages sit in a divine thunder . . .
My blood is cymbal-clashed and the anklets of the dancers tinkle there . . .
Harp and psaltery, harp and psaltery make drunk my spirit . . .

I am of the terrible people, I am of the strange Hebrews . . .
Amongst the swarms fixed like the rooted stars, my folk is a
streaming Comet,
Comet out of the Asian tiger-blackness,
The Wanderer of Eternity, the eternal Wandering Jew . . .

Ho! we have turned against the mightiest of our young men
And in that denial we have taken on the Christ,
And the two thieves beside the Christ,
And the Magdalen at the feet of the Christ,
And the Judas with thirty silver pieces selling the Christ,
And our twenty centuries in Europe have the shape of a Cross
On which we have hung in disaster and glory. . . .

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh
Is a cup of song,
Is a well in Asia.

PART THREE
THE GREAT MOTHER

FIRST

WAR

WAS it by night the riders told me 'There is War'?
Was it in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle?

Was it then that the heavens opened upon me and I saw the snaky and bloody face of a gargoyle God
Leering through heavens of thunder,
That I heard the Harpy of the universe, screeching, with long-nailed fingers before her chin,
Yea, whistling like great shells that shall blast blood?

Night, were you not a vomit then, bursting out the four skies with the belch of chaos,
Till I cowered in downpour of filth and horror?
Did I not flee Divinity as one flees madness?
Did I not seek to escape being a man?

Where was the dream of my youth which saw a world of singing cities and of garden homes,
A world in Christ and of comrades in Christ?
What was man, O what was I myself, as I had known him?

Was it true that human beings were tearing each other's flesh to the death, with laughter for anguish,
While the world was a shambles in thunder?

Was it so, this frenzy of cannibals whose guns devoured great hosts
And whose teeth ripped souls for pleasure?

Were the seas blood flooding Europe till whole peoples went floating and bobbing with groans and curses?

Yea, is this man, I asked, yea, is this the dreamer of dreams?
Is this he who climbed from the darkness toward the high vision of heavenly love?
Have I not heard songs which filled the skies with the beat of the wings of seraphs?
Have I not participated in mysteries of homely miracle where tenderness murmured in a low voice
And heard women chanting lullabies to tired children?

There were waters of Babylon where exiles wept and were comforted,
There were blue dark seas for the longing of Iphigenia,
There was a moon-lit garden of Verona, and lagoons of Venice . . .
Weep, ye Italian poplars, where John Keats lies buried,
Thrill, ye seraphs of song, requiem for Beethoven . . .

But it was in the night the riders told me, 'There is War,'
But it was in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle . . .

Yea, then I knew, yea, then in my heart I knew,
And it was revealed to us all, what man is . . .
Yea, then I saw in him that monster of eternity with snaky tresses
Leering through heavens of thunder,
I perceived in him the Night that was a weltering vomit and a river of vermin,

I saw in him the Abyss which we carry in our whited bodies . . .
I saw Man, the Stupendous, the Abominable, the Unutterable, Mystery, Creation . . .

It is because the World is Demon-God in the rages of struggle,
And because Man has issued from Demon-God to be man,
That our glory is rocked in the arms of Terror . . .
Yea, behold the animals, they fight one another, yet theirs is quiet and is peace,
But our adversary is God, but our battle is with the omnipotent;
We must wrest our souls from the clutches of eternal Might;
We must win to ourselves from the Harpy of the Universe . . .
Lo, if we evade the battle, lo, if we turn our faces to greeds and desires,
We are swallowed down, even people by people, into the bowels of the God,
And in madness turn from conquering God to slaying each other . . .

Was it by night the riders told me, 'There is War'?
Was it in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle?

SECOND

DEVIL-SONG

A SONG for man:
A song for the breaker of the wild Horse who clatters
across the bridge of the Milky Way at midnight:
A song for the universe-wrestler, star-rider, the wing'd with
dreams . . .

Star-stuccoed, the monstrous magnificent Ghost in things sends
suns roaring out of his mouth to whistle in the belly of
the pit:
An image of him and his eternity is in the brain of a man:
Man is Satan, born of the Lord to conquer the Lord . . .

We walk in hiding sunlight or wrap us in darkness . . .
There are ten dimes in a dollar, H^2O is water, stiff collars
wilt in summer;
A woman's body is soft and cool under the body of a man;
Yet the wrapping of darkness falls off in sleep and drops us
in the abyss of dreams . . .

I saw in dreams in visions of the night, I saw . . .
We dwell in nebulous hinterlands, nethermost fires, coasts of
time . . .
Our Ghost is one gigantic shadow darkening the Galaxy like
an eclipse of God . . .
Tears falling from a woman's eyes on her dead lover are little
things
But the curse on death in her heart is a mighty thing . . .

God is like the last of a storm that shrinks away before the despairing courage of humanity . . .
We have battled him a million years, and are only beginning . . .
We live to fight him, and there is no fight for greatness and glory like the fight with God . . .

When we go to war with each other, he is the enemy . . .
When we wrest power from the entrails of mountains, he is the foe . . .
My song is snatched from the splendour of his heart, I steal from the abyss with gladness:
We have eaten of his Trees and thieved his wisdom and filched his medicines . . .

My brother, the beast, lay down in the bath of God's glory and has been obedient like the rolling of the Earth . . .
So my brother the beast is a dark beast forever . . .
But you and I and our hardy little mothers and fathers
Were rebels in Cosmos, we snatched a little self from the nebulous floods,
We broke ourselves in two and spiked ourselves with agony,
And began an endless Armageddon against God . . .

Every song that floats from the lips of man or wails from his violin,
Every high soul that is starlike in our darkness,
Every vision that gets into marble and steel and raucous engine,
Everything that makes Earth throb with a human radiance in the brainless glare of the suns,
Is sign of a triumph over the Lord, a glorious victory . . .

Ye hosts of Satan that go into death with your hands on the trigger of your daring,

Ye have made man the eternal revolutionary,
The never-to-be-downed defier of Jehovah . . .
Ye have left in our souls the unquenchable resistance to things
dead and things done and the soft bed of the past,
Ye have left in us creators and the valiance of the future,
The never satisfied, the endless vision, the gambling greatness.

THIRD

ABYSS

IS man only a bloody flesh
With the stitching needles of passion and thinking flashing in and out,
A mouth, a phallus, a hand,
Ambition, despair—no more?

Alas, and glory, we are the Abyss, we are the Abyss;
We can climb down the interior mountain walls of a torn and bottomless canyon
And in that brown sunless and starless shadow with the smoky torch of the Ego
Picked chasmed glooms out with our thin rays
Revealing coasts and rings of Valhallas and chanting Heavens,
Terraces of Hell populated with the damned of a million years,
Terrains of divine animals moving in the dawn of time . . .

We walk a narrow strip all our days between Madness and Sanity . . .
Move but a little to the left and we start a swarm of Furies and Harpies,
And are driven into waters where the tiger-fish lies mightier than Leviathan
And are gulped down deep as Dis in the eternal belly . . .

In fear of the Lord we ice over the top of the Pit,
We lay a floor of the ice of complete forgetfulness,

The frozen waters of the turning away of our eyes and our ears to our many neighbours and our feeble tasks:
And we skate in a fearful oblivion of the Eternal on the rind of ourselves . . .

'There is no God,' says the fool,
And, 'There is no Devil,' says the imbecile . . .
Down in that smithy and matrix-mill the swarthy monsters of Creation
Are smelting and puddling and rolling and hammering the living future,
Preparing great dooms for peoples,
Shaping gigantic new Gods for groping nations,
Brewing blind revolutions and earthquakes of change . . .

Lo, when the preparations bulge toward the daylight of the act
Sledgehammers of God come shattering through the ice,
And peoples and nations tumble into the madness of themselves,
And there is famine and pestilence and fury and war,
And the vast slaying of the Old,
And in slaughter and tumult we work the will of Creation . . .

The great only are beforehand with the Lord.
Unterrified and with Promethean daring they descend willingly,
With the faint smoky torch they pick black paths toward abysmal Mystery,
Until they are closed in utterly,
Until they lie down in darkness, as dead:
And they are mixed with the stuff of divinities and demons,
They are streaked and layered and infibred with prophecy and power and wisdom,
They steal and drink and endure the eternal fires,

And fighting right and left with a terrible courage they bear back to earth
Loot of creation in song, story and prophecy,
And in many inventions. . . .

And the greatest are they who go down like Dante for a journey of years
And single-handed fight and conquer the Eternal,
In proof that man is the equal of the Gods,
And that he can battle with the Omnipotent until he wrests from immortal hands a soul of his own,
Reborn, the conqueror, hope of our ages . . .

He who conquers comes into the last wisdom:
Lo, the divine immensity of life itself wills the creation of human souls,
But has no power to give that birth save as man himself conquers it . . .
The Eternal goads us to battle with the Eternal,
The Gods coerce Man to fight the Gods,
As if only that which is won through terror and struggle is worth the winning . . .
As if Creation grew only by the clash and war in itself . . .

FOURTH

THE GREAT MOTHER

THE Great Mother: an abomination and glory:
A mystery . . .

I lived with the Great Mother for seven long years . . .
I searched her womb and consumed her everlasting body . . .
I rode her, my white mare, down the roads of dream . . .

In horror and ecstasy I wandered in her great ghost,
Till this world floated phantom-like and I peered out through the mist of the mother, white-faced, at a people who were symbols,
And hills and streets that were signs . . .

She took my strength from me: she bled me white:
She cast decay on my youth and made the rapids of my laughter a tinkling trickle . . .
I was enervated: I was listless: I was in love with drowning:
The days of my youth were over . . .

O whore of Babylon, that the ancients sang of,
City of Fornication and Abominations,
Incestuous Lorelei-alluring Mother!

And I rose like one from the grave and fought her . . .
But she was many . . .

She was a city, a host, a people, a heaven of stars . . .
What did the ancient one say?
I became a stallion, she became a mare,
I became a bull, she became a cow,
I became a nymph, she a god,
I the adored Virgin, she my Son,
I was a Serpent, and she a maiden,
I the Devil, she my concubine . . .
For every appearance in which I clothed myself she took on the opposite appearance . . .
I surrendered or I fought: it was all one . . .

My soul went glimmering in the abyss of her ghost . . .
She had swallowed me down, a hot mouthful, and I lay in her belly . . .
When the horror was deepest on me she appeared before me as the one beautiful,
The one adored and beloved . . .
She struck me with her hoof like Pegasus and song gushed like a fountain from the trampled earth of my soul . . .
She was unconquerable because she was within me and yet I within her . . .
And because her phantoms walked out of me and clothed men and women with her likeness,
And I was dragged to these men and women by the phantoms that left me . . .
And so living women became the mare to my stallion, the nymph to my satyr, the mother to my son . . .
And so I fought a helpless and hopeless battle with these women,
As though they were a city and a host and a people and the heaven of stars and moons and suns . . .

Great Mother who has been called by all wonderful and terrible names . . .

Universe, she is called, and Nirvana, and Satan,
The Great Snake that coils about the heavens and the earth and the heart of a child,
Leviathan and Monster of the Deep, Jehovah, God . . .
Her name is Wisdom, her name is Saviour, her name is Christ . . .

A man is lost who enters into God who is a city whose gates may never be taken . . .
Yet a man is great who enters into God and is lifted into the cosmic and eternal battle between man and God . . .
He who conquers God shall overcome and be crowned with power and peace . . .
The conquered God becomes the comrade of a man . . .
Universe-wisdom mates with his . . .
He shall have the Mother for wife . . .

How shall one conquer the never-to-be-overcome?
How shall a man tame the universe?
How ride astride the mare whose feet are in the east and the west beyond the stars?

A strange way: a mystery . . .
It is a terrible and a fatal word that whispers through his soul . . .
'Renunciation! renunciation!'
He knew that word whose arms were stretched on wood and his hands nailed through,
And whose body sagged on the straight beam . . .
Save that ye cease from love of the Mother,
Save that ye cease from the great love that makes you the child of the Mother,
Cease from desire to be in that womb,
Cease from longing for the horror and glory, the abomination and mystery,

Cease from the wish to be God by piercing God,
Ye shall not conquer her . . .

Ye must be willing to be born and be naked and be nothing
but a human man,
Little and of no account, swinging no more in abysses where
stars drop like cinders,
Done with the sweats of ecstasy and the dung of horror,
That, severed from her, she may now go at your side, perfect
in beauty and glory . . .

She is conquered by your cleavage from her,
She is yours, because you are no longer hers,
She is subdued to equality because you choose to be solitary . . .
She has no strength on them who do not desire her . . .
Her abominations cease, because they were the offspring of
your own wishes . . .

She becomes forever beautiful and strange to you . . .
Jerusalem shining like a star on the hills of heaven.

IX

STANNER: THE MUFFLED CITY

STANNER

THE MUFFLED CITY

STANNER, in the desert by night, saw one clear star in the sky above him. So he felt impelled to travel in the darkness to a muffled city. When the black bulk of it stood before him, he knew that he was about to learn things of importance. And almost at that moment the gates opened and a man approached him. He could not see the features of this man.

"Stranger," said the man, "you now have come to the City of Black Onyx. It is a city of cubes, of blocks, of squares. And it is also known as the Muffled City. All who see a star clear in the sky above them come to this city and only they. I stand therefore by night on the parapet and await the star-seers. I welcome them, if they trust me. If they distrust me, the desert is theirs."

Stanner's heart beat fast. He understood that he must either give himself over to the man of the City of Onyx, or remain outside the city. He hesitated.

"Is doubt permitted?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the man, "doubt is necessary, or there could be no virtue in entering the City. But you must not doubt long. Best speak it out."

"Perchance," said Stanner, "having gone in I will never get out."

"Should that stop you?" asked the man. "You once entered the City of Earth, with no escape but death."

"I may have pain," said Stanner.

"When," asked the man, "have you been free of pain?"

Then Stanner said lightly, "Lead the way."

"If you will do one thing," said the man. "Strip naked here and follow."

Stanner shivered, but he stripped of his clothes. Then the man led the way. Stanner heard the gates shut behind him, and they were bolted fast. The man said:

"Know this. There is only one exit from this City."

"And where is that?" asked Stanner.

"Upward," said the man.

The way was utterly black, the stones cold and rough. Stanner stumbled and was bruised.

"Walk, till you see the darkness," said the man, who now, in the darkness, was only a voice.

They walked on.

"Wait," said the voice. "The pool of Remembrance lies before you. It is icy cold. Instantly fall in, cross it and ascend."

Stanner felt his heart turn ice. But he obeyed. He leaped and plunged and the fearful waters closed over him. He struggled, thinking he was dying. Then his feet felt steps and painfully he ascended.

As he reached the clear again he knew a sharp pain. It was in his heart.

"Oh," he cried, "who is cutting me?"

"I," said the voice, "I am cutting away the pain of Remembrance."

Stanner almost swooned. But suddenly he felt lighter, as if a burden had dropped. Almost instantly he brushed into a great animal and something like a serpent coiled about him.

"Steady," said the voice, "it is only the Massive Elephant. Allow him."

Stanner held himself together and suddenly was lifted by the animal to the back. In a moment he was rocking to and fro as the elephant went forward. They climbed a hill, and

without warning Stanner was catapulted forward over the elephant's head and hit the ground, senseless.

When he recovered he was in a bed. All was still dark.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"In the Muffled City," said the voice.

"Ah, you are there," said Stanner.

"I am always there."

"Of what use," said Stanner, "has been my coming here?"

"You forget your contract," said the voice.

It was so. Stanner lay silent, in dumb anguish. Then four dark shapes (were they Negroes?) lifted the bed at its four corners and bore it out of the room. They traveled a long way in the black and voiceless city. There was no light.

Then they entered another house and set the bed down.

The voice spoke:

"You are in the Inn of Understanding."

"Will there be a light in this Inn?" asked Stanner.

"If you make it," said the voice.

"But I am naked," said Stanner. "I have no matches."

"Neither have I," said the voice.

Stanner lay still. Then he did a bold thing. Without asking the voice he arose and groped about the room. His hand came on something. It was a can, very sticky and gummy. He stuck in his hand and caught something. A bird? It fluttered. And he saw two sharp glints, its eyes. He would have thought it a snake if it had not been for the feathers and soft body. He was frightened but glad.

"It is the first light," he said.

The voice was silent.

Suddenly the fluttering creature broke free and flew. Stanner saw the sparkle of the eyes about the room. Again he said:

"This is the first light."

"There is a second," said the voice.

"Where?" asked Stanner.

The voice said: "I do not know."

Stanner groped further about the room. He stumbled on something. He crouched and fingered it.

"This must be a vise," he said.

"Screw your right hand in it," said the voice.

"That would mutilate it," said Stanner.

"Try," said the voice.

Stanner obeyed. He put his hand in the vise and screwed it tight. The tighter it grew, the stronger grew his hand. The vise flew to pieces, a bell clanged, and a light appeared in the wall.

Stanner stood amazed. It seemed to him he stood in sudden dazzling radiance.

"What a beautiful room!" he cried.

It was blue, and a map of the heaven and the stars on the walls and ceilings. In the center was a table loaded with food. And a chair at the table. A fire rose in the hearth.

But there was no bird, and no other man there. Stanner stood astonished. Was he alone?

"Oh, no," a voice sounded near, "I am here."

Stanner stared, his hand holding his leaping heart.

"What are you?" he asked.

"That which is never to be repented of," said the voice. "Sit and eat: you are tired and hungry and have earned rest."

So Stanner sat and ate. He felt good at last. But hardly had he finished when the voice said:

"Up and out. The Eagles are calling."

"What Eagles?"

"The Eagles of the Starry Nest."

"How shall I see them?"

"You have read darkness. The book is open to you."

"Read darkness!" echoed Stanner. "The light is turned on here."

"It is your light," said the voice. "This is the Inn of Understanding. Out. The Eagles are calling."

Stanner arose. To his amazement he found himself clothed in a blue garment that had wavering lines of gold running through it. The door flew open, and he heard a calling in the outer darkness. The calling was mighty and it was in words:

"Follow! follow! The day is breaking! The world is waking! The earth is shaking! Follow, Stanner, follow and see."

And going out he was aware of fresh winds smelling of the ocean. They were clean winds and good. His garment blew. His nostrils drank. He was ready for high enterprise. All over the sky were the streaks of daybreak. There stood the buildings square and solid, without windows. There rose the cobbled street ascending the hill. And in the air were five triumphant Eagles circling and swooping.

They went toward the hilltop. He followed. No one was about.

At every step new life came into him. He felt jubilant and strong. He ascended.

And now at the top of the hill he saw. The city was gone. The world lay about him, hills, meadows, mountain-ranges, farms and distant cities. Oh, the Earth, so long loved. Oh, living people where every chimney smoked.

And looking up in the sky, he saw a glinting and shining of wings. It was Golden Bird.

X

EPILOGUE:
THE BINDING OF THE YEARS

THE BINDING OF THE YEARS

YOU came, beloved, when the need was greatest . . .

The darkness piled up on me, year on terrible year,
Until I staggered toward destruction . . . you came,
Your love my only light through the final passage of darkness . . .

Are we destined?
Early in my youth I knew I should have to endure everything.
I was omnivorous for all that a human being may live.
I must go the common way and the great way . . .
Know the experience of being just the husband and father and fighter and man,
Know also the peak-paths of the solitary above the mass,
Share in actions, and give myself into the flesh of passionate earth,
Withdraw to the clear pure heights of the spirit where the God is a thin gold of love,
Pry loose the fastnesses of knowledge with the whetted blade of the intellect,
Drag the depths of splendid passion, give myself to others,
Fight in some great cause in public,
Burst the secret of life and lift it to my gaze,
And know Love, the great Love, the Love that most dream and only a few live.

And why?
For Art! Because I must sing this life for the future of the human race . . .
It was not enough to have the Muse with me unloading the heavens through my pen . . .
I must live all things: absorb into myself every darkness and light of experience:
And I must grow myself to the stature of my vision,
And the power of my art,
Until song and man were one.

Urge toward development!
If a man could be a God, that is what I wanted . . .

Such natures are the worst and best: the weakest and the strongest:
They open themselves to everything, and that which in most is hidden, the mean, the servile, the demonic, the low,
Swirls loose, shows its ugliness and frailty, blots out strength . . .

There were those who saw me a shaft of power:
There were those who saw me a weakling . . .
There was one who saw both, and the overcoming and victory,
And you went, beloved, with me through the last black waters,
Where all is lost, and all is found . . .

2

New times demand new men:
The past seems petty in the light of the task we have set ourselves . . .

Since man was, he has known Nature as the inexorable asker of the sacrifice:

He has known the Gods, the demons, the spirits, the masters of men:
He has known the gigantic force which creates through him and destroys through him:
And his heroes have dared the depths to bring peace and power.

Who is the saviour? Is it God or is it Man?
It is God overcome by Man, until the divine wisdom is the servant and friend of human wisdom,
Until God and man speak as one . . . then paths open,
Then songs appear, then religions are born, then arts are created . . .
Then an Age spreads its mighty tableland for the march of a race . . .
Then we have nations: a China, an India, an Egypt, a Greece . . .

Out of the conquered Gods we make our greatness . . .
But look upon the past, and behold the price of the conquest . . .
Or look at the Christians keeping in with God by shunning the world, the flesh and the devil . . .

No, we have set ourselves to a mightiness that shall make this earth the home of men:
It is the mightiness of that all-in-one
Where God is the instrument of man and man is the instrument of God
And in peaceful power every world of life is moved through and lived.
June 28, 1923

DEAD GODS

SWIRL, down from the skies with a trumpet-shout, ye wild riders . . .
Whistle the wind in the blowing of your white skirts as ye sing to the Earth,
Break up, break up with the hoofs of the divine horses the ice of our rivers . . .
Send tumult of waters to the sea . . . Valkyries, the Gods
Lie slain: it is dusk of the Gods . . .

The clouds have split open for a moon-pour on an amazed wide world of death . . .
Row by row the dead stare moon-eyed into their tomb of the stars,
And great marble Gods are scattered among them, broken by the hammers of the swarthy Fate-Makers;
The Nazarene is shattered: and the Heavenly Father is an idol of quartz crumbled and dust:
And the Mother of Heaven is a shoal of pebbles where the sea chants her eternal dirge . . .

Doom of the dead: the dead shall live no more:
Sweep to the dead from the skies with a final trumpet-shout, ye wild riders:
Sweep swirling to the dead, pealing triumphant glory-song of the unresurrectable Christ . . .
Cleanse the planet of the fetid flesh, of the vulture-torn corpses of the Ages . . .

Bear the great ghosts on your backs to invisible Valhalla . . .

For as ye pass, the ice of our rivers cracks and is shivered and shattered
And tumult of Spring rides down, and the shout of the dawn,
And young Gods, never seen before, laugh to the dance and laughter of Man.

INDEX OF FIRST LINES

A deathless music, 522
A fancy teases my brain, 240
Again great song, 509
Against Death, 515
Ah, had I the wings now, 212
And now I know how quiet a thing, 375
And when I heard that voice, 489
Are you in my arms, my bird, 494
Ask for no mild millennium, 172
A song for man, 532

Beginning millenniums back, 244
Birds of our joy, 519
Bitter, bitter, 164
Body, whence come mind and soul, 213
Breast of Earth, with all these sea-worn stones, 177

Come, let us take our breakfast in the city where the people dwell in darkness, 498

Dance, my words! 512
Death and birth dog us, 176
Down South's singing: "Darkies," 377
Do you think, my boy, that when I put my arms about you, 209

Far from the sun over the ages and spaces of the sky, 214
Fierce hunger has come upon me, 204
Fires—Fires out of the dark, 418
Fling your lasso of light curling about our heads, 499
Forget yourself into a child, 496
Four great lovers rose in America, 437

Go a little aside from the noise of the world, 176
Golden bird, 521

Have we given up thy spell, Renunciation? 184
Ha! you count it horrible that the murder was committed, 174
Here is strength, here, 161
He sang as if the heavens held only two things: God and himself, 225
How many are strong enough to reject riches? 175
How wonderful is love, 507

I am no sorrier for you than I am for myself, 207
I am so happy these days, 205
I awake, 246
I come of a mighty race. I come of a very mighty race. . . . 525
I could write the psalms again, 218
If like your kinswoman of old, 503
If marriage is to be one flesh, this twain made one, 216
I go to Europe, 257
I have a notion tonight that the Earth and I, locked in each other's arms, 220
I have been felled by beauty, 508
I hear the window, 376
I heard someone singing about Russia, 416
In a dark hour, tasting the Earth, 182

In an old square, in an old city square, 510
In mist Monday, 372
In the fragrance of her simple heart I still bathe myself, 197
In the loved melancholy of grey evening, 387
In the spring I come to a resolution, 319
I paint your portrait, 516
I saw the unwritten face of the child, 177
Is it on a coast of my soul, 477
Is man only a bloody flesh, 535
I stooped to the silent Earth and lifted a handful of her dust, 241
I take as my master, not you nor myself nor the past, 178
It was as if myself sat down beside me, 145
It was the sea, ever the sea, vii
I want a woman for the adventure, 200
I was as a sieve for the wind this morning, 163
I would raise a slow and majestic hymn to Death, 399

Joy wings his way, 425

Last night in the theater, 239
Late, and lonely and faint for sleep, 208
Let nothing bind you, 146
Let now my soul, 501
Like a golden storm, 505
Lilacs shall bloom for Walt Whitman, 438
Lily-of-the-valley, 486
Listen, dear Golden Bird, 491
Looking down on Earth, 237
Love, 196

Moonlight and Autumn: floods of silver, 382
Morning is my time, 389
My beloved is the prow of my spirit plunging through the billowing blue of the morning, 500
My life does not belong to me, 153
My love is a winged heart, 493
My song begins with the song of the sea, 335

Neither from the woe, 162
Not for long can I be angry with the most beautiful, 443
Not until you find a meaning in yourself, 227
Now Golden Bird, 488
Now is sunset, 403
Now the day dies and the workers trudge homeward, 228

Of old the psalmist said that the morning stars sing together, 154
Oh, my being, opening into the dazzle of sunrise, 195
O miracle of love—504
O my most bitter mood, 160
On a downy feather of the dove, Earth, I lie, 224
Once I freed myself from my duties to tasks and people and went down to the cleansing sea, 147
One would think the dead were burying the living, not the living the dead, 173
Only on the days when my life has ebbed, 226
O the wild rose! 481

Priests are in bad odour, 167
Push off the clinging arms, 152

Sky-lover, 223
Stanner, in the desert by night, 545
Starless and still, 221
Stuck in the mire of many philosophies, 156
Sundown tonight, 395
Sun, with a million eyes, 215
Swirl, down from the skies, 556

That bothered you, didn't it? 229
The babe is the beautifully cunning dust that desires and breathes, 211
The dark years, the dreadful years are upon me, 409

The dreamer in me keeps on dreaming, 245
The Great Mother: an abomination and glory, 538
The haunted heart beseeches me, 151
The love of man for woman and woman for man, 150
The old hag sat on the park bench, picking her teeth, 166
There comes a moment when to believe is not enough, 169
The sea is itself: it does not fear to be calm or stormy, 176
The sea put a finger of foam on its lips of waves, 177
These are the days of immense and solitary strength, 231
The sea whispers to me of women, 177
The ship of skies, 371
The soul is an abyss, 167
The storm dies, 391
The wind was so bitter, 165
The wheeling heavens, at this moment wheeling, 158
The world is wild, 217
The world was a dream of beauty, an ache of loveliness, 5
The writer of many books was weary, 230
They set the slave free, striking off his chains, 155
This is love's proof, 497
This starry world and I in it, 236
Though I am little as all little things, 210

Vast is the city, concealing fires behind its walls, its streets and its faces, 227

Was it by night the riders told me, 'There is War'? 529
We have drunk deep, 435
We spat on the dirt and the flesh, 170
We, that are the very waters of change, 179
We wind wreathes of holly, 329
What does the woman sing to the love-seed under her heart? 235
What face lifts, so perfect in profile? 206
What is the tiny flame of my match, 176
What shall I say of the great years in-between? 471
What song shall I sing to the heavens? 219
When a woman is wanted, 202
When from the brooding home, 185
When I consider Thy heavens, 447
When I get *there,* so I told myself, 226
When in the death of love, 148
When that your beauty, 514
When the youth left his mother's house, 263
Where love once was, let there be no hate, 149
Where may she of the hall-bedroom spend the love-hour? 199
Who can measure the agony of man? 180
Who is the runner in the skies, 238
Why am I restless? 159
Would you lay a pattern on life and say, Thus shall ye live? 157

Yea, there are as many stars under the Earth as over the Earth, 243
You and I in the night spied on by stars, 193
You are mine . . . you are mine . . . you are mine, 490
You are not as other maidens, 483
You came, beloved, when the need was greatest, 553
You cannot exile me, 226
You have come on me like a head streaming fire in the November blackness, 479

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 00190 763 1

WITHDRAWN
No longer the property of the
Boston Public Library.
Sale of this material benefited the Library

Boston Public Library
Copley Square
General Library

PS3529
.P6S4
1924
2643271537

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.

HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN
BOOKS